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Printers

Reprodux of Hereford

Cover Design

Windhorse Associates

Games International, Lamerton House, 23a High St, Ealing, London W5 5DF. Tel. (01)-567-7740. Fax (01) 579-6485

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UP FRONT

Hi,

This is your editor here, welcoming you to the first issue of **GAMES INTERNATIONAL**, or G.I. as our acronym would have it.

Sorry we're a bit late but we thought it better to take our time getting it right rather than coming out looking like something no self respecting fish would want to be seen wrapped in.

In case you're wondering, G.I. is not being published by some faceless corporation, nor is it being launched to promote in-house products. It is being launched because everybody connected with the production of G.I. believes there is a need for a quality magazine of this kind. All the staff and contributors are both keen and knowledgeable games players but that does not mean G.I. is solely a labour of love. We have to make a profit. It's the way of the world (sigh).

I suppose you think we are now going to get out the begging bowl and grovel for subscriptions. "Turn to page 50 blah, blah, blah". "Mail immediately blah, blah, blah". Wrong. Whoops, er, I mean right.

Around the start of the second paragraph most new mags, especially hobby ones, tend to bleat on about on how what you are reading is "your magazine". As you have probably just laid out the best part of a pound for it, they've got a point.

We are not about to tell you that this is your magazine even though you have *probably* paid for it. What we would like to do is direct you to page 50 (no, not a subscription form). There you will find a free classified section where you will be able to advertise your games club, sell games, or, if you have difficulty finding opponents because you live in a remote part of the country like Manchester, you may advertise to find an opponent(s). Free.

We are sort of interested to hear your views on our magazine which we will publish in our 'Rebound' column, Postman Pat permitting. Positive criticism will possibly be welcomed, but then again, probably not. What we definitely don't want to hear are moans of a sectarian nature that question why we used up valuable space reviewing a

game about mowing the lawn when we could have used it to assess the latest **Advanced Squad Leader** module. Our philosophy is that a game is a game, all of which are entitled to their fifteen minutes of fame.

Nevertheless we recognise that most gamers have their own field of interest and to cater for this GI has been compartmentalised for ease of reference. Naturally there will be those who whine "but what's **The Killer Bimbos Invade Washington** doing in the wargames section?" To which we will reply, we haven't got a clue, so save yourself a stamp.

To help you assess the likes and dislikes of our writers we hope the Desert Island Games feature will provide an entertaining look at their whims. At a later date we might ask readers to contribute, depending on reaction to the concept.

Aggrieved manufacturers who mistakenly think our reviewers have taken liberties with their latest wonderful offering will be guaranteed a right of reply, *and* a human sacrifice if they advertise with us.

Our magazine? Your magazine? Who cares? Just lie back and enjoy it.

CONTRA CON

Issue Vol.23, #6 of the **General** contained an article "Revolution vs Revolution" by one James Werbaneth, which purported to be "background notes" for Avalon Hill's **Firepower** but was really little more than a crude propaganda piece for the Contras. What, I wondered at the time, was such an obvious ideological tract doing in a games magazine? Worse was to follow; a letter (no doubt one of many received) was published in Vol.24, #3 of the same magazine which posed the same question. Unfortunately the author has some curious notions about spelling, as his unedited letter makes clear.

In his reply, editor Rex Martin makes it clear that he did not feel "obligated" to correct the spelling and sarcastically refers to the authors "fit of passion". It should be pointed out that the article won the "Reader selected Editors choice" (you work it out) in the **General's** annual poll, though curiously it was only rated third by the same readers in a poll published two issues later.

Meanwhile vol.24 #2 of the **General** contained a self important letter from Werbaneth "clarifying" his earlier piece. Part of this clarification process was to

recommend an article "Sandinistas In Power" published in the Right Wing rag **Problems of Communism's**, which he describes as a "thoroughly balanced work". Werbaneth then goes on to point out that his article was compiled before the Iran-Contra scandal and was therefore "incomplete", and ends up prophesying Nicaragua's "complete economic collapse". Not very interesting Jimmy, and anyway, what does all of this have to do with the game (**Firepower**, in case you'd forgotten).

The otherwise excellent variant magazine **Battleplan** also jumps on the propaganda bandwagon with a "Campaign Level Scenario" by James McQuaid entitled "The Wilderness of Mirrors". Inevitably there is a "background" piece which goes on to describe the "Sandinista national dictatorship" who are in the midst of planning Invasion USA. While the latter idea places the scenario firmly in the realms of fantasy the writer does seem to be treading on dangerous ground here. Without wishing to go down the same road it is nevertheless worth pointing out (which neither Werbaneth or McQuaid do) that the Sandinistas were democratically elected in elections deemed "free and fair" by a visiting European commission.

The real point though is: should politics be introduced into gaming in this manner?

Historical simulations are usually released after a decent interval has elapsed, thus the problems confronted therein are rendered somewhat abstract, conforming to the notion that one of the main pleasures of the hobby is being able to withdraw temporarily (in most cases) from reality and escape some of the horrors of the modern world.

Games on Modern Warfare simply seem to add to a climate that makes the insanity of war not only possible, but rational, more so now that they are accompanied by paranoid 'background notes' penned by Joe McCarthy clones.

Lest anyone doubt the increasing politicisation of this side of the hobby, take a look at the credits for a forthcoming game on, you've guessed it, Nicaragua, to be published by **Strategy & Tactics**: "Designed by John Burt (a Vietnam marine vet), and Joseph Miranda (formerly Psychological Operations at the US Army's Special Warfare Centre and School)".

Phew! Those are pretty heavy credentials guys. But do you really think they will lead to a better game?

THE REVIEW SECTION

GAMES INTERNATIONAL RATING SYSTEM

Star Rating

- ***** Top class game; highly recommended.
- **** Very good game; definitely worth buying.
- *** Worth a look.
- ** Only if the subject interests you.
- * A true turkey.

The ever expanding review crew is made up of a combination of the best writers from the many games fanzines that circulate throughout the country, and professionals from the games industry.

Ellis Simpson and Mike Siggins are the backbone of **Sensation**, an excellent 'zine specialising in wargames and sports games, which, although amateur in status, is professional in content. Our 'American Desk', Alan R. Moon, is the former assistant editor of the **General** and a prolific games designer.

Linda Little is a well-known denizen of the PBM world, running her own PBM/chat-zine **Totally Zane**. She has play-tested PBM games for many companies.

David Parlett is the designer of the award winning **Hare and Tortoise** and

a specialist on card games, a subject on which he has authored several books. David is the first of our recruits from the late lamented **Games and Puzzles** magazine.

In our next issue, **Warrior Knights** designer Derek Carver will be joining the team, along with the former **Games and Puzzles** editor David Pritchard.

Each issue we will feature a 'Game of the Month' award, for which games in all categories will be eligible. This will eventually culminate in a 'Game of the Year' award.

Unlike other publications, advertisers will not be able to 'buy' good reviews, though inevitably the two will sometimes coincide. Our responsibility is to our readers. Stay with us.

The Editor

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GENERAL GAMES

GAME

OF THE MONTH



KREMLIN

DESIGNED BY
URS HOSTETTLER

PUBLISHED BY
AVALON HILL

PRICE £17.99

The unexpected arrival of Matthew Rust in Moscow's Red Square and its subsequent effect on the career prospects of certain politburo members provided this odd game with an unexpected topicality when first published by Fata Morgana, a group of Swiss anarchists, in February 1987,

shortly before Herr Rust began his historic flight.

This Avalon Hill edition contains a number of changes to the original which we will be looking at in more detail next month.

But for those of you unfamiliar with either version here's how it works: the playing board depicts the Soviet politburo from the Party Chief down to the 'candidates'. At the outset all the positions are vacant so the various offices such as the KGB Chief are represented by heads and shoulders, or faceless, if you prefer.

Onto these spaces will be dealt the character cards which contain the age, and personal details of politicians that will not be appearing at conventions in Geneva. Juri Nikotin, Leonid Bungaloff, and Oleg Satin for example. The age of the various cold warriors is very important indeed, for, amongst other things, this is a game about ageing.

After all the nine slots in the politburo have been randomly filled with character cards you now turn to your character influence sheet and allocate 'influence points' to your various choices, starting with 10 points and working down to 1 point. In all there are 26 characters in the game, so initially you will have influence points on eleven politicians. The ones not yet holding politburo positions will be either 'candidates', or (just plain) folk patiently awaiting their chance to seize power.

A turn represents one year in the Kremlin and consists of eight phases. In order for any politician to act in one of the phases somebody must declare influence points on him. This is done on an auction basis though you never may bid more points than you wrote on your influence sheet at the outset. Once control has been determined then the controlling player may now activate that particular politician, so for example in phase 2 (purge phase) the KGB chief may now attempt to purge whoever he considers to be his enemies.

This is done by first announcing the potential victim and then rolling a twenty sided die. The higher the

opponents position then the greater the die roll needed for success, whereupon the unfortunate is dispatched to the remote area of the board marked 'Siberia'. For every successful purge the KGB chief ages one. Should he fail, he must stop immediately and age three years, or stress points as the rulebook cutely states.

Phase three sees the 'Imperialist Spy Phase' whereby the player controlling the Defence Minister can accuse any number of his fellow ministers of being running dog imperialist spies, or he can bring to trial any members so accused in a previous year.

A trial consists of asking fellow politicians (in effect the players controlling them) whether they deem him to be guilty, or not. Two votes against are required for acquittal, if they are not forthcoming then a dispatch to the icy wastes is instantaneous.

Again each accusation costs stress points to both parties, and an unsuccessful trial means a further three, which could make it tough to get through the 'Health Check' (phase 4).

Here you refer to a graduated (according to age) chart to check age against the die roll, and it's very much a case of the old die young. The effect of the die rolls can be one or two heart attacks, or even the long goodbye for the truly geriatric.

Heart attacks are indicated by placing the appropriate number of red crosses on the victims card. If it's his third attack then don't bother, just bury him with due honours under the Kremlin wall.

There are in fact two charts; one for 'at work', and another for 'in the clinic' where you may send your minister at the start of every subsequent turn if he is looking not quite so perky, i.e. near death. Although there is a good chance of recovery for patients during the health check, the downside is that your chances of being purged are that much greater also, for the KGB Chief can add 3 to his die roll during the purge phase.

If there is no party chief at the start of phase 5 then an election must occur. This is euphemistically referred to as

the 'Head of Funeral Commission' phase, for it is a tradition in Russia that the head of such a commission will be the next party chief. The Foreign minister may now propose a senior minister to fill the vacancy who will be elected if there are less than three votes against. If his nominee is rejected then he must nominate one of the rebels, and if he also is rejected then the foreign minister himself becomes Party Chief.

You'll have probably realised by now that there will be several vacancies in Moscow for the sort of positions not normally found at your local Job Centre. This brings us to the 'Replacement Phase' whereby those still lucky enough to have jobs in the politburo may promote one level, e.g. from candidate to level 2. The Party Chief may also demote and shuffle sideways. Each action costs 1 stress point, of course. If there are still vacancies then these are filled from the next level with the oldest gaining precedence. Just like the real thing, or at least until Mikhail came along.

Phase 7 may or may not bring in the spies (and the purged) from the cold, for it's rehabilitation time. Any member of the politburo may 'rehabilitate' a politician from Siberia at a cost of 5 stress points to himself.

Phase 8 and the moment you've all been waiting for – the victory conditions; the Party Chief must now attempt to wave at the October Parade. If he is fit then he waves automatically, if he is sick then he needs to roll 7+, and very sick 14+. The winner is the first player to have a Party Chief controlled by his faction wave three times.

Should no player have achieved this by the tenth year, then the winner is the player controlling the highest ranked politician at the end of phase 5 of the subsequent year.

It is difficult to determine the skill/luck ratio in this strange game, but who cares? the important thing is that it is such fun to play, and in any case the usual post-mortem rules will apply, i.e. if you win it's skill, and if you lose, jolly bad luck squire.

The production of the game is quite superb with all the phases being cleverly colour coded on the board for ease of reference.

The artwork for the character cards from the original Swiss version – Ralph Steadman meets Aubrey Beardsley – has been wisely retained, though with the addition of colour. Perhaps at this point I should declare a personal interest in the game, for it was I who wrote the character histories on the back of the cards, though I would like to stress that the £1m Avalon Hill paid me for my services in no way influenced this objectively wonderful review, comrade.

Playing time can vary wildly from thirty minutes, if someone succeeds in a quick victory attempt (but woe betide you if you fail), to two hours for the full ten years.

KREMLIN plays best with 4-6 players who will need only an average amount of grey matter to understand the rules.

B.W.

6-TAGE RENNEN

DESIGNED BY
WALTER TONCAR

PUBLISHED BY
HOLTMANN V.I.P.

PRICE £16.00

The Germans have a wonderful knack of marrying abstract problems with perfect themes and nowhere is this better illustrated than in '6 Day Race', as the translated title reads.

Like any good racing game, the movement system is the heart of the beast; players simply play a movement card on their turn and move the corresponding number of spaces, but, and it is a big but, if they end their move on a space containing another rider then they may move double the number of spaces they have just

moved, or, if there were three riders on the space landed upon then they would move triple, and so on, in effect, 'slipstreaming'.

This is a very simple and elegant mechanism. Just how elegant becomes apparent when you realise that without slipstreaming you don't have enough cards to reach the finishing line. So the problem is of course, if you whiz off in front then there is nobody to slipstream, but better this than lagging too far behind the pack, for no matter how hard you pedal you'll never catch up, and there's always one. 'Wait for me,' you'll cry as the pack pedals merrily off into the sunset but nobody's listening.

Indeed, how to avoid such an embarrassing fate is one of the many baffling things about what appears to be a very simple game, though a strong element of skill is suggested in that all players are dealt exactly the same cards at the outset.

There are three types of scoring systems to determine a winner:

THE YEAR SO FAR

SHARK

(Flying Turtle)

An excellent semi-abstract stock market game from this Belgian based company. Currently without a UK distributor but available in specialist shops £14.99

MAFIOSO

(Casper Games)

Good family game with a lot of bluffing and an exciting ending. Nice components too. But where can you find this game? Come in Casper supremo, Mark Caines. £17.99

SCHOKO & CO

(Schmidt Spiele)

(see feature)

BLACK MONDAY

(Hexagames)

Stock Market card game from ace designer Sid Sackson. Ideal as a quick filler. £8.99

MASTER- PIECE

(Kenner-Parker)

Welcome return of an old master. £14.95

ILLUMINATI DE-LUXE EDITION

(Steve Jackson
Games)

A sensible repackaging of this imaginative game from the folks in Texas. £12.99

- 1) Points for winning the sprints and for finishing in the first four.
- 2) After each race calculate how many laps other rider are behind the winner. As there are lap markers provided on the board this is a simple task. After the last race the player with the least number of laps wins.
- 3) This is a combination of the above two and the one which I prefer. Simply deduct the laps from the points scored.

As for component quality, the playing board is bright and colourful but nothing special, however the plastic bikes provided enhance the feel of the

game. The scoresheets unfortunately are rather inadequate though it's quite easy to make your own.

Six-Day Race announces itself as being suitable for 3-8 players, but it can also be played as a team game or players may control two riders each.

As with most games of this nature it's a case of the more the merrier, and I would not recommend attempting to play with less than four.

One of the many joys of this game is that you can be playing within five minutes of opening the box, while teaching others takes literally under a minute.

Playing time can be varied to suit the occasion by pre-determining the number of races. Each race takes about 20 minutes.

Whichever way you play it I'm sure you'll find it both extremely baffling and enjoyable in about equal proportions.

Availability is limited, though Just Games of London are expected to have some in stock with a translation by yours truly and our American correspondent Alan R. Moon.

On yer bike.

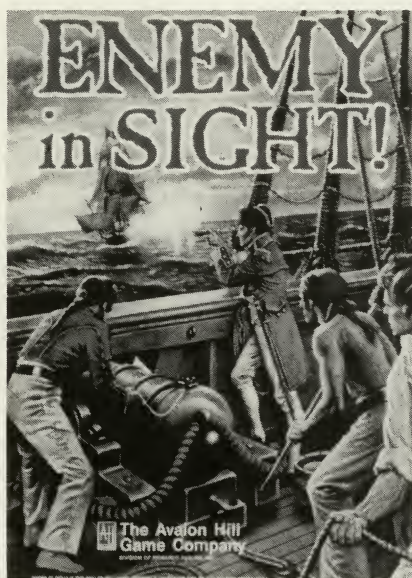
B.W.

ENEMY IN SIGHT

DESIGNED BY
NEAL SCHAFFLER

PUBLISHED BY
AVALON HILL

PRICE £10.95



All things considered it's been quite a year for re-issues and revisions with **Crude** and **Masterpiece**, being resurrected and **Kremlin** being published in an English edition.

The latest vessel to sail into harbour flying a new flag is **Enemy in Sight**, a card game based on Avalon Hill's Naval

War. Having said this it should be pointed out it is a different game and a considerably more sophisticated one.

As with 'NW', players are dealt a fleet of six ships, but these belong to the Napoleonic era in which the game is set.

The ships range in quality from first rate to sixth rate and encompass four different nationalities. It will come as no surprise to anyone when I tell you that the object of the game is to reduce your opponents fleet to driftwood. This is achieved by firing broadsides at your victim via use of action cards.

You may attack the rigging or the hull of your target, each of which has a strength factor. When the strength factor of the rigging is equalled or exceeded then down it comes subjecting it to the status of 'dismasted' vessels. As such it is liable to be boarded and captured as a prize.

If the hull factor is equalled or exceeded then Davy Jones's locker is your next stop. The player who inflicted the final blow scores points, at the end of a round, equal to the combined rigging and hull factors of the sunken ship. Double points are scored if you manage to sail a prize back to your home port, and while this may seem an attractive proposition it should be pointed out that these are recorded immediately so opponents can easily see who is in the lead. The winner is the first player to score 100 points.

If you get bored with sinking ships then you can always set fire to them by playing the appropriate card, and then cheerfully watch them blaze away until the bucket brigade comes along. There are also blockade cards to stop players taking prizes home and 'refuse battle'

cards which remove any such blockades.

If nobody has reached the target when there are no more action cards left, unlikely after one round, then a new round commences and players get dealt a new fleet.

The rules are clear, concise, and should be understood by anybody with a passing knowledge of the English language, though the 'break the line' rules need to be read carefully.

The game is great fun to play especially with a large group of people (the game can take up to eight) who have a penchant for churlish acts of revenge. The luck of the draw helps, of course, but there is enough room for strategy to be able to convince yourself, at least, that it was all skill really.

Playing time is about 90 minutes, though this can be varied by increasing or decreasing the victory total.

This is one game that is definitely not treading water (sorry).

B.W.

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THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER

DESIGNED BY
DOUGLAS NILES

PUBLISHED BY
TSR

PRICE £14.95

**

Yes folks, it's the old one-two-three-four again: book, computer game, film (in the making), and now the boardgame (*where's the T-Shirt? – Ed.*).

At first sight though the game looks far from being just a quick spin-off, arriving as it does in a large flat box which contains some very impressive looking components, including a large high

quality playing board, coloured stand-up counters a la **Platoon**, numerous charts, and a generously illustrated rulebook.

The purchase routine on this was simple; I like naval games, I like modern naval games, I liked the book, and the price was right. QED. I actually bought the game in the States and lugged it back with me thinking I would be the first kid on the block etc, only to discover it on sale at Virgin.

The game, despite the name, attempts to cover all aspects of naval warfare and not just the main thrust of the book. Counters are provided for ships, subs, planes and for the Soviets, US and some token NATO forces. Each counter is rated for detection and attack, some counters having special abilities, such as helicopters, Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) capacity etc.

The counters are placed on the map facing away from your opponent. The map is composed of irregular areas and covers the entire North Atlantic area

from North Norway to Cuba. The scenarios, of which there are eight, go from introductory sub hunt, to the full works using all the counters.

Fine so far. The area movement system seems to work even with large numbers of pieces, as there is a facility to combine into task forces with correct additional defence benefits and ASW/AA screens. So what's the problem? Answer; the game system. It is so simple it might as well be 'Admirals', if you get my drift.

Basically, you are allocated a number of detection markers. Either during alternate movement, or after completion, these are placed in any area where there is both an enemy and friendly counter. One marker can be placed per friendly counter and this allows searches to take place. With few complications the search procedure is to roll under the detection rating of the searching counter. Once detected, the opponent can be attacked by rolling under the attack number. Subs can be attacked by ASW counters even if



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undetected, which seems rather odd. Larger battles between task forces have more steps but at the end of the day the resolution is the same. I suppose the theory is, that given enough ships the overall effect is reasonable, but in reality it means a lot of die rolling and little or no excitement.

If I am ripping this system apart because I have missed a rule then many apologies, but I have read the booklet twice to find out if, and where, I'm going wrong but so far I've found no reason to change my opinion.

A strange combination then; very pretty components, plenty of potential and scope, but

married to a minimal game system that does no justice to the subject matter.

I have not even bothered to comment on the logic of the search system which is mystifying to say the least – the flaw being that your opponent knows where and what you are, so can search aggressively for what he wants, not what he can find by normal search procedures. Weird.

The rulebook carries the threat of a **Red Storm Rising** game for 1989. If it is anything like this effort then I'll give it a miss and save my money. Perhaps I expected too much of an introductory game, but over the last few years I have come to expect a higher general

standard of games, especially given the success of **Onslaught** (TSR), and **Platoon** (Avalon Hill). Neither did I expect a detailed simulation, indeed I would have settled for a smooth, quick, fun game, but this just fails to cut it at any level, either as a game, or as a simulation. It's only role I can see is being an introductory tool for **Risk** graduates.

In fairness to TSR it should be said that this is being marketed as a family game. Unfortunately though that is part of the problem for the game looks uncomfortable in either camp.

M.S.



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First the brown box, then the red box, and then **Death Zone**, in what is rapidly becoming the gaming equivalent of 'Police Academy 4'. To continue the cinematic analogy, the new **BB** is the 'U' certificate version tailored for mass approval. Many of the more gory rules have gone, like being able to eat your opponents innards, for example. Subjectively, and with a few qualms, I believe this leads to a better game.

A few words of explanation for the benefit of rookies: the object is to score touchdowns a la American Football, except here we're dealing with the Dwarf Warhammers rather than the Chicago Bears, though there is nothing to stop you nominating the latter as your team.

Depending on which version you play, each of your players has skill characteristics which increase/reduce the probability of him (this is a man's world) performing certain actions. For example, if one of your players throws the ball to a teammate the chances of him making a successful pass would depend on both the length of the pass and his throwing ability, which, if good, would enable him to add one or more to the die roll. The same type of die modification applies to the recipient of the pass. In between times all manner of mayhem occurs, as players tackle,

block, and generally stomp all over their opponents.

The first noticeable change in this new edition is that the team count has increased by one to sixteen, which must be rather irritating to those who like to play with metal miniatures as they come in blister packs of five, but there is really no reason why you can't play with fifteen players.

The rules now consist simply of basic and veterans, the main difference being is that with the latter you can nominate certain players as catchers, blitzers, etc. so that die rolls are modified accordingly. In the basic version all players have the same characteristics. Indeed the game is so straightforward that you can be playing within a few minutes of opening the box, which is no bad thing.

Kickers have been eliminated, as have 'star player points' which seems a pity, as there was immense satisfaction to be gained from reducing your opponents top man to a heap of bones.

Inevitably there is a lot of die rolling in the game, but if you've no objection to this then the game should prove to be very enjoyable, and the rules are flexible enough to incorporate changes should you wish for more of a simulation of the grid iron game.

For those who have never played the game before this the place to start. A pity then that Workshop have devoted the enclosed players handbook to a would-be humorous look at the mythical teams and the fantasy world they inhabit. This may appeal to Workshop's dedicated fans, but surely they will have the game already? Better I would have thought to incorporate some of the optional rules from **Death Zone** together with some advice on how to set up a league, and perhaps a brief history of the (real) game for those playing for the first time.



From the Blood Bowl rulebook.

Blood Bowl comes with 32 nicely detailed plastic figures, a polystyrene pitch (which should be painted for best effect), and various accessories for measuring passes and 'scatters'.

As usual Games Workshop do a fine job of supporting their games with a wide range of accessories. For **Blood Bowl** there are a wide range of excellent metal miniatures available, including cheerleaders and linesmen, should you wish to create new teams.

Highly suitable for two players interested in American football and gratuitous violence.

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MCMULTI

DESIGNED BY
JAMES J. ST-LAURENT

PUBLISHED BY
HEXAGAMES

PRICE £24.95

For those of you with long memories this new release from Germany will be more familiar to you as **Crude**, originally published by St. Laurent Games of California in 1977. The game drew rave reviews at the time but sales were limited to the knowing few, perhaps because of its high price for its cost £18 even then.

As a result **Crude** quickly became a collectors item and today a copy of the original would fetch at least £300 so check your attic *tout suite*.

As for St. Laurent Games, one can only assume they sank into the adjacent Pacific for they were never seen or heard from again.

Enter stage right Hexagames, in particular their product manager Joe Nikisch who has long been a fan of the game and was the prime mover in ensuring that the plethora of ideas contained therein were not lost forever.

Whether you were familiar with the original or not you could not fail to be impressed with the production of this reincarnation.

Altogether you get around 350 3-D plastic playing pieces representing oil wells, refineries, and petrol stations. You will probably have guessed by now that the crude in the original title refers to oil, and the production and conversion to refined thereof.

At the start of play each player is assigned a quadrant on the board which consists of a grid divided into four quarters of six squares by six. On two sides of the grid there are die faces from 1 to 6, and 6 back down to 1.

In between the quadrants are the foreign and domestic markets on which the barrels of crude and refined are placed, while the centre of the board represents sales to the consumer market.

Prices are determined by simply lifting (for buying) the next available barrel on the foreign or domestic market and paying the price printed underneath. As virtually the same method is used for selling this means that each player has a say in setting the market price. The consumer market works in the same way but here of course, you are only dealing with sales.

There is a special preliminary round in which players may purchase assets to the value of their starting total of \$200m.

A common strategy for the first player is to cover his grid with 36 drilling rigs at a cost of \$5 each (the effect of this will be explained later).

A turn consists of; 1) buying or selling oil on the markets; 2) producing crude oil, refining crude oil, and selling refined oil to the consumer; 3) buying and selling assets.

The second phase is probably the most crucial. This is where players roll the dice and place them on the matching numbers running along the side of their grid. The results are then read off along the grid, both horizontally and vertically. Anything on the corresponding line of the grid is considered a 'hit', so if, for example, you had a gas station on the line that was hit then you would be able to sell 1 barrel to the consumer market, or in the case of two gas stations, 2 barrels, and so on.

If a refinery of yours was hit then you could refine 1 barrel of crude. To be able to produce crude you need a well and the only way that these can be obtained is if a rig is hit both horizontally and vertically on the grid. So the player who covered his grid with rigs during the set-up round would be guaranteed the option of converting to a well on his first turn.

If the well is hit subsequently then it produces 2 barrels of crude and a degree of self-sufficiency.

Whenever a double is thrown the prices at which assets may be purchased and sold change according to the economic situation cards, which go all the way from depression to prosperity, and while the latter means you can sell at a good price it also means inflated asset prices. One of the many clever counter-balancing mechanics in the game.

Doubles also mean that one of the rumours that has been circulating in The Wildcat Journal may take effect, but it's no good whining about bad luck because it was a calculated risk.

The winner is the first player to amass one billion dollars, a process which normally takes about 2 hours.

Despite the importance of the die rolls, luck is not so important as good planning and shrewd purchasing, while the lack of player interaction is more than compensated for by the constant decision making.

Although **McMulti** emanates from Germany they have produced a completely English edition in anticipation of sales to both the UK and US. The rules show signs of translations but are pretty clear nevertheless, however, beware of the economic trend arrow; on the economy cards the arrow sometimes points down but this merely reflects the trend and is not to intended affect the consumer market in any other way. Something the rulebook does not make absolutely clear.

McMulti is for 2-4 players, age 14+, and preferably with a penchant for economic/trading games. It's taken eleven years for it to reappear on the shelf, don't miss out on it this time around.

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OCEAN TRADER

DESIGNED BY
JOHN RUDFORD

PUBLISHED BY
CLIPPER GAMES

PRICE £19.99



CLIPPER

Located, appropriately enough in Portsmouth, Clipper games sail in with this, the first of a planned series of games aimed at the family market. That will be the last seafaring pun, by the way.

Opening the box we find a beautifully designed mapboard, 18 neat little plastic sailing ships, and money, cards, die, etc.

No inventory for components is provided so you'd better hope they're all there.

The object of the game is to collect various commodities from ports around the world and then deliver them to the ports requiring them in the hope of making a profit.

At the outset, all ships start in Liverpool (the game is set in days of yore). Five delivery cards are exposed and will be replenished when two deliveries of the required items have been made to the port thus designated. Movement is by die roll, so it can be seen that this is pretty much a racing game.

So far, so simple. Fortunately though, there is a bit more to it than that. You may, for example, purchase an additional ship to the one you started with, or, you may speculate and buy goods which are not yet required in the hope that they will be needed later in a port not a million miles from your vessel.

The first player to deliver a consignment gets four times the amount he paid for them, the second player gets double, and the third player gets a headache, though if the stench of his rotting bananas gets too bad he can always jettison them for half price.

Players are also able to buy shares but you have to be quick for there are only ten available.

Once a player has acquired a majority of these then he may declare it, and if, after twelve more turns, he still has a majority holding then he is deemed the winner providing he has £750 in cash and a ship. To facilitate ease of play a turn track should really have been provided on the board, both for this and other stages of the game.

The game is quite fun to play but some of the rules could do with tightening up a bit, especially the ending, which, in its present form leads to the game lasting far beyond its natural life, though in fairness, the rulebook presents a shorter version where you pre-determine the game length. A cash target is another possibility.

The rules do not state whether trading or loans between players is possible. Providing their ships were in the same port this could provide an interesting option and would give the game the interaction it presently lacks.

The components are good quality and the artwork on the board is splendid though the spaces on which the ships travel are far too small, especially when there are more than four players.

With a few rule modifications then, Ocean Trader could be a fun game for 2-6 old or young salts aged 9 and up with a couple of hours to spare. Welcome aboard (whoop's), Clipper Games.

B.W.

VULTURES

DESIGNED BY
MIKE HENRY

PUBLISHED BY
HENRY GAMES

PRICE £19.95

This is one of four new releases from Henry Games aimed at the family market, all of which feature excellent graphics, nice components, and, unfortunately, high prices.

The playing board in **Vultures** is a bright yellow grid with an alpha-numeric co-ordinate in bright red running around the edge of the board. Playing pieces are represented

by four Vultures, surprise surprise, which fit into the wooden holders provided.

Each player is dealt 3 cards which may be 'flight' cards (for movement), 'fight' cards for combat, or a 'carcass' card. In the case of the latter another card is drawn to determine the grid co-ordinate on which the carcass will be placed (nearly all the cards have a grid co-ordinate number on them). There is also one 'vultures fight' card which must be played immediately, and until it is, no combat can occur.

The only way to obtain additional cards is to hop into a tree and draw a card each turn without moving. Other options on a turn include moving, staying where you are, picking up a carcass if you are on the same square as one, or fighting.

Combat is resolved simply by each player revealing a fight card, highest wins. The victor may then take a

carcass, if available, from the loser. If your opponent does not have a fight card then he puts the kettle on, for he is out of the game.

The winner is the first player to wing it back to a tree with five carcasses in tow. A process which usually takes about thirty minutes.

The game is quite fun to play and not without a strategic element. Moves must be plotted carefully and if you venture out into the wilderness in search of a few bones, you should ensure that you always have sufficient cards to make it back to a tree where you cannot be attacked.

If this were priced around £10.00 – £12.00 then it could be recommended, but £20.00 seems way over the top for what is essentially a board and 53 cards. Nevertheless, this vulture is no turkey.

B.W.

HOW SWEET IT IS!

A Recipe for Success in SCHOKO & CO. by Alan R. Moon

If you ask a player what makes a successful multi-player game, he'd probably say that player interaction is the key. This is certainly true as far as it goes. However, the best multi-player games force the player to compete not only with his opponents, but also with the game system and himself.

How do you play against yourself? Well, all players have a game playing style; conservative, aggressive, methodical, harebrained etc. Sometimes this style mirrors their personality and sometimes just the opposite. A game which allows for different styles of play gives every player, no matter what his style, an equal chance to win. Of course, it also gives him an equal chance to hang himself. Showcasing playing style by rewarding good play and exaggerating poor play is one of the things **SCHOKO & CO.** does very well. So consider this article an attempt to help you avoid humiliation.

To understand how clever **SCHOKO & CO.** is, you must look first at how the sequence of play and the player balance are intertwined. There are eight steps to the turn sequence:

- 1) Looking at the Wirtschaftsdienst card,
- 2) Hiring and firing employees,
- 3) Bidding for and buying cocoa,
- 4) Producing chocolate,
- 5) Selling chocolate by bidding for contracts at sales meetings,
- 6) Processing contracts gained at sales meetings,
- 7) Exposing the random event card,
- 8) Taking out or repaying loans and buying shares.

Each turn, there is a game leader and play proceeds clockwise from him. The order of play makes no difference in steps 4, 6 and 7; in effect these steps are performed simultaneously. The order is somewhat important in steps 1, 2 and 8, depending on the game situation and how you're doing. The heart of the game though is steps 3 and 5, and here the order is crucial.

Ideally, you would like to go first during both steps 3 and 5, but this would simply be too much of an advantage for the Game Leader. So the game lets the Game Leader go first in step 3, but makes him go last in step 5. the Game Leader is still left with an advantage but not an unmanageable one. In fact, in some ways, the second player has just as much of an advantage, playing second in step 3 and first in step 5.

Naturally, there are other factors involved in balancing the game like the amount of cash on hand each player has, the results of the previous turn, etc. but perhaps the only other

factor that needs to be considered here is the length of the game. Because of the player order, the game length should be a multiple of four. An eight turn game is probably the best, though four turns is fine for those who want a shorter game. For longer games, 12 or 16 turns should be played. Don't let the rulebook's estimate of 3 hours for an eight turn game scare you. I have found that eight turns rarely takes more than 2 hours if the players keep the game moving. Step 5 will be the deciding factor. Move it along and you'll cut the game time down quite a bit. Allow players time to think at each bidding progression and you'll be in for a long game. A game length in a multiple of four though, is absolutely necessary for play balance.

STEP 1 – Peeking at the Wirtschaftsdienst Card

To look or not to look, that is the question. \$15,000 is a big hunk of charge just to look at a card. On turn one, you simply can't afford it. On later turns, you may have to bite the bullet. The 'Kakaoschock' card is especially deadly. Each turn it doesn't appear just makes it that much worse. If 'Kakaoschock' hasn't come up during the first couple of turns, spend the \$15,000 each turn. If it's already come up, don't waste the \$15,000 unless you won't miss it.

STEP 2 – Hiring and Firing Employees

Your first chance to blunder occurs with your very first decision of the game, where you must hire your initial workforce. Hiring two workers, two secretaries, and one bookkeeper is pretty standard. you'd hire more workers if you could, but you can't increase your workforce by more than two including the first. The decision here involves whether you should hire one or two salesmen.

Each salesman lets you attend four sales meetings. Since one contract is available at each meeting, on the surface it would seem like two salesmen would be better than one. This assumes more is always better though, and this is not the case here. Chances are at least one player will hire two salesmen and there will be eight meetings during the turn. This means if you hire only one salesman, you have to choose which four of the eight meetings to attend. No big deal. You probably won't want to attend more than four of the meetings anyway. So why pay the extra \$12,000? Let your opponents pay it. You can then use the \$12,000 to buy more cocoa during step 3.

Of course, there's a rub. If everyone feels this way and only hires one salesman, there are then only four meetings. With

only four contracts to be had and four players each with an equal amount of money, chances are it will be tough to get more than one. And if you only get one contract, you only need one secretary to process it, and you've wasted \$8,000 on the second one. So maybe it's better to spend the extra \$12,000 to hire the second salesman so you don't waste the \$8,000 on the second secretary. Hmmm, there has to be something wrong with that kind of thinking.

From the preceding, you'll notice that hiring two secretaries may not be so automatic after all. As further proof of this, remember that because you only have two workers, you'll only be able to produce six bars (or sixty tons) of chocolate. It's possible you'll have the chance to get one contract for all six, again meaning you'll only need one secretary. There are at least three possible problems with hiring only one secretary though:

- 1) Often two contracts (for three each, or two for two and four) will be worth more than one for six,
- 2) There may be no contract available for six bars,
- 3) It puts a lot of pressure on you to get a big contract and another player may have the same thing in mind.

Luckily, in this, like many of the other decisions in the game, the player order will help dictate what you do. Basically, if someone before you has hired two salesmen, hire one salesman. If you're the Game leader hire one salesman and two secretaries. If you're the third player and neither of the first two have hired two salesmen, you're in the toughest spot. Do you hire two salesmen? Do you hire only one secretary? It's a tossup. Perhaps you could try making a bargain with the fourth player. Perhaps you could just go by your knowledge of the fourth player's style. If you're the fourth player and no-one has hired two salesmen it's also a tough call, though my inclination would be to hire just one salesman and one secretary and use the \$8,000 you save to your advantage in step 3.

On later turns, you'll have the same kind of decisions. Plan well. In effect, every employee you hire but don't use costs you double the amount you paid. Saving \$8,000 or \$12,000 may not seem like a lot, but if used correctly during steps 3 and 8, it can make a lot more.

STEP 3 – Buying Cocoa

While you have your first chance to blunder in step 2, step 3 is the part of the game where you can really make a fool out of yourself. There are three basic decisions in this step.

1) How much cocoa should you place on the market?

The main considerations here are how much money you have, how much money you think your opponents have, how much cocoa you really want, and how much cocoa you think your opponents want. But the player order rears its ugly head again too.

Looking at turn one again, the most cocoa you'll be able to make into chocolate is six bars. Don't be too concerned by this. The price of cocoa usually goes up as the game goes along, as people tend to have more money each turn. How much you make available on turn one will directly reflect your playing style. If you're conservative, put up sixteen. If you're aggressive, put up none. If you're

somewhere in between, find your number between the two.

I've already mentioned the 'Kakaoschock' card which means there will be no cocoa next month. If it comes up and you didn't know it was coming, it really will be a shock. Chance it on turn one. After that play it safe and look at the card.

2) How much should you pay for cocoa?

Here is where the game gets interesting. of course, you want to pay the least amount possible. So do your opponents. Two possible strategies are:

- a) Use New York as a gauge, and possibly Tokyo too. See what your opponents are willing to spend and then use this information to bid on the cocoa from Frankfurt, Paris and London.
- b) Go for it in New York. Bid \$3 or \$4 a bar. Chances are you'll surprise everyone because they'll be using strategy #1.

This is where the Game Leader has a tremendous advantage. In effect, he wins all ties. If you're the third or fourth player, don't try to be too clever. Put up the bucks. You simply can't afford to be shut out. You gotta spend to make it.

Is there a maximum you should pay? Yes, approximately. Using turn one as the example again. If you buy the maximum of six cocoa and manage to sell them all, chances are you'll be able to sell them for about \$20,000 a bar in step 4, for a total income of \$120,000. If you spend \$50,000 on employees, that means that the maximum you can spend for six bars and still break even is \$70,000 or about \$11-12,000 per bar. But forget breaking even. You want to make money. You want to hire more employees next turn. try \$5,000 per bar as the maximum you really want to pay. This will go up as the game goes on, but you should know the break even number at all times.

3) Should you buy more than you need?

It is always a good idea to have in mind the minimum amount of cocoa you want to buy at the outset. Don't be wishy-washy. Make you mind up and then make sure you get the number you want.

After you've met your goal, then you can forget it and start to think about being greedy. Unless you have got the maximum amount of sixteen cocoa bars, or don't have any money left, you should never sit back and let your opponents set their own price. If you had to pay \$5,000 a bar, make sure they have to also. If they're not willing to pay the going price, you'll be glad to take more. The more you get, the less they get.

STEP 4 – Producing Chocolate

This is one step where you get a break. It's almost impossible to mess up here. Simply produce the maximum possible.

STEP 5

The tension really hits a peak during this step. This is make or break time, where you either make a profit, or see your hopes go down the tubes.

I like to think of this step as chocolate poker. So to start, let's put all the cards on the table. There are 23 contract cards, made up as follows, bearing in mind that ten tons equals 1 bar:

Three	10 ton cards,
Four	20 ton cards,
Five	30 ton cards,
Four	40 ton cards,
Five	50 ton cards,
Two	60 ton cards,

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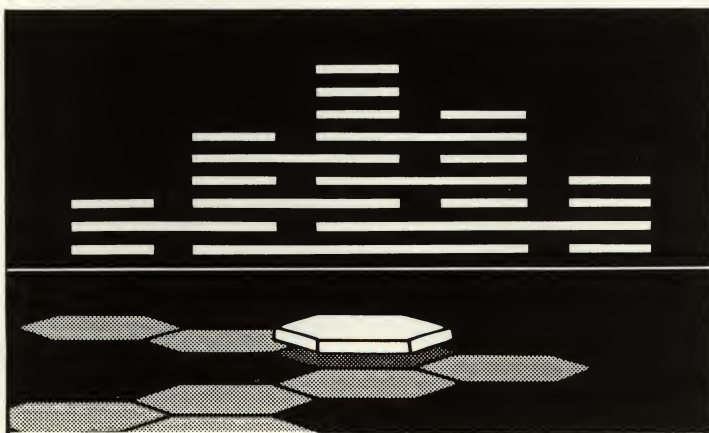
One bar	= \$40,000
Two bars	= \$70,000
Three bars	= \$90,000
Four bars	= \$120,000
Five bars	= \$130,000
Six bars	= \$140,000

Earlier, I said you may be able to make more money by getting two contracts for three bars each, rather than one contract for six bars. One look at the above table should be enough to show you why.

The bidding can get pretty wild, and the tension tends to build as each contract is awarded and fewer remain. It can also be somewhat hypnotic, and you should avoid getting caught in the trance. Again, it is a good idea to have a number in our head right from the moment each contract card is revealed. Don't second guess yourself. If you're offered the contract for that amount, take it. If you're not, let it go. Alter the number in your head as the situation changes, not during the bidding for any particular card.

I've already said that \$20,000 per bar is about the minimum you should accept. Chances are that on contracts for 1, 2, or 3 bars you'll get more, and on contracts for 6 you may get less. Despite this people will generally go after the bigger contracts. This is a trap.

In the last game I played, I wound up with about six or seven smaller contracts after one turn, taking almost all of them for \$20,000 + per bar. I could only process two of them two of them that turn because I had only two secretaries and one bookkeeper. On the next turn however, I hired two more secretaries, one bookkeeper, and did very little of anything else besides process most of the backlogged contracts. My



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opponents thought I was crazy when I kept taking the little contracts for 1–3 bars, but crazy or not I won the game (*it was a fluke – Ed.*).

This strategy is pretty much a tradeoff. While four contracts for 3 bars each will earn you more money than two for 6 each, you will need either twice as many secretaries and bookkeepers, or else you will have to take an extra turn to collect all your money. But if you have lots of contracts, you don't need to buy so much cocoa and you can take the pressure off for a turn.

Price isn't the only thing to consider though. Keep a close watch on the number of bars your opponents have left for sale. If you have 4–6 bars left and nobody else has more than three say, you're in a good spot. If a contract for 4–6 bars comes up you get the best of both worlds; you get rid of a lot of bars at once, and at maximum price because you are the only one with the capacity to accept the contract.

Of course, waiting for this situation to occur can lead to disaster. Don't pass on a contract just because it leaves one of your opponents with the most bars left. Sure if a big contract comes up, it makes him look like the smartest guy around for sticking it out. But, if a big contract doesn't come up, you're the one looking peachy instead.

STEP 6 – Processing Contracts

This is the second step you can't mess up. Simply process everything you can. Get those bookkeepers and secretaries working!

STEP 7 – Exposing the Random Event Card

This will be a tense moment if you didn't have a peek at the card during step 1, or a big ho-hum if you did. I've already said that 'Kakaoschock' is the worst, but let look at the others in order of pain.

BAD CARDS

- 1) 'Der Kakao sitzt fest' (each worker produces only one bar of chocolate next month instead of three) – This is the second worst card. If it hasn't come up yet then you may want to pay the \$15,000 for you can lessen the effects of this card by planning accordingly.
- 2) 'Schoko Protest' (everybody removes 5 chocolate bars). This costs you not only the money you spent for the cocoa, but also the salaries you paid the workers to produce the chocolate. You'll hate yourself if you have chocolate left and didn't accept a smaller contract during the turn.
- 3) 'Schock im Schokolager' (everybody pays \$5000 per bar of chocolate) – Effectively, this doubles the price of the cocoa for those bars. This decreases the profit made when you do sell these bars.
- 4) 'Schokolade: Finanzielle Magenverstimmung' (contracts at the bookkeepers are cancelled) – This can be a horrendous card, except it is very unusual to have contracts at the bookkeeper from one turn to another. About the only time this will happen is when a player has a bookkeeper that it is ill, or on vacation during a turn.
- 5) 'Arbeitsmarkt leergefegt' (no new bookkeepers may

be hired next month) – This is usually no big deal, except for a player with a lot of excess contracts.

GOOD CARD

'Personal: Finanzausschub' (the player with the largest employee salary total receives \$50,000) – \$50,000 is nothing to sneeze at, but what this card really does is allow you to hire some extra employees during the turn if you look at the card. If you paid the \$15,000 to look at this card, you could then increase your workforce by \$35,000 and still break even. And \$35,000 of employees is a lot. For example, for \$36,000 you could buy one each of the four types.

STEP 8 – Taking out or repaying loans and buying shares

Schoko & Co. must obviously use American banks because the interest on loans is a whopping 20%. Obviously, at this price, you don't want to take out a loan unless you have to. When you have to is when you find yourself in either of the following two situations:

- 1) You don't have enough money to pay your employees salaries next turn.
- 2) You need to get cocoa and you're not sure you'll have enough money to buy all you want.

If you do take a loan, pay it back as soon as possible. Never take out more than one unless you are truly desperate. Better to fire employees than take out a second loan, though it doesn't matter much because you've probably lost whatever you do at that point.

I'm not sure why Wertpapier shares are part of the game. They really don't seem to have anything to do with anything else. Still, I'm glad they're included. You get an indication of who is winning by who is buying them because money that you don't need to pay employees or buy cocoa should be put into Wertpapier. The return is only 10% each turn, but that's a lot better than nothing if the money just sits in your company. Again here, an overall turn plan is vital to maximise your profits.

I've dealt mostly with turn one because this is the easiest turn to analyse. The same principles apply to every other turn as well. It's just that there will be more money, more employees, more contracts, etc, to think about. Here's a few other basic things to think about:

- 1) Don't waste the advantage of being the Game Leader or going second. You should be more aggressive during these turns. You may do as well during the turns you go third or fourth.
- 2) If you don't do well during one turn, don't panic. Chances are your opponents will make the same mistakes too.
- 3) Watch what employees your opponents hire and fire. This is the best indication of their plan for the future.
- 4) Don't underbid yourself out of the game in step 3.
- 5) Try to form a pattern of your opponent's tendencies in step 5. Most people find it very hard to randomise their actions. Most of the time, they'll stick with what they think works.

Few games allow players to use psychology as well as **Schoko & Co.** Bluffing, discerning your opponents' styles of play and tendencies, and using both tact and guile all play an important role. Luck is non-existent. You win or lose on your own.

I've made no bones about liking this game. The pieces fit together perfectly. You must have a sound domestic policy by which you run your company and a sound foreign policy to compete against your opponents' companies. **Schoko & Co.** rewards good planning, good execution, and good psychology. It punishes poor planning, rash decisions, and indecisiveness. It can be very intense, but it can also be a heck of a lot of fun.

Having said that I do have some minor quibbles (is there anything such as a major quibble?). The only real problem with the game is that experience is such an advantage. While it is relatively easy to teach someone how to play, it is not so easy to teach them how to avoid making a critical blunder. And this is a problem, because if a person does something dumb on turn one or two, they then often have no chance of winning from that point on. I would, therefore, suggest playing two turns with new players and try to show them all the pitfalls, and then start over.

Another problem is the Express Cards which I have not talked about. Unless you're a purist, don't use them. They are simply too unbalanced, some being very strong, some very weak. They add an element of luck into the game which should not be added. If you must use them, use my alternate mix of cards (see the optional rules section) which you should find more balanced.

My final quibble is with the Wirtschaftsdienst cards. Why are there only seven? Nine would have been more logical, so that in an eight turn game, you would have enough to have a different event each turn and one left over. Or, for that matter, why not 13? Which is what I have created (see the optional rules section).

OPTIONAL RULES

1) Advertising and Marketing.

Add a fifth type of employee to the game: an Advertising Manager (you'll have to take some pieces from another game). His salary is \$11,000 (\$5000 if fired).

During step 5, you may send one or more Advertising Managers to any sales meeting one of your salesmen attends. You must state you are doing so before the bidding begins. More than one player can send an Advertising Manager to the same meeting.

The price of any contract you gain when you send an Advertising Manager is increased 25% per Manager, rounded up. For instance, if you accept a contract for \$91,000 and had sent one Advertising Manager you would get \$113,000. If you had sent two Advertising Managers, you would receive \$137,000.

Each Advertising Manager can only be used once per turn.

2) Two Types of Chocolate

Add a second type of chocolate to the game: dark chocolate (you'll need to make up a whole set of bars).

During step 3, you may produce either or both types of chocolate from your cocoa. One cocoa bar will produce either two dark chocolate bars or one regular bar. One worker can produce a mix of both types.

Make a second deck of 23 Dark Chocolate Vertrag Cards.

	Mindestpreis	Hochtpreis
20 Tonnen (x2)	\$10,000	\$22,000
30 Tonnen (x2)	\$18,000	\$36,000
40 Tonnen (x3)	\$28,000	\$52,000
50 Tonnen (x3)	\$40,000	\$70,000
60 Tonnen (x4)	\$54,000	\$90,000
70 Tonnen (x4)	\$70,000	\$102,000
80 Tonnen (x5)	\$88,000	\$136,000

During step 5, divide the maximum number of meetings in half and take that many cards from each of the two decks. Resolve all the Dark Chocolate contracts first, then all regular contracts.

This will change step 4 a lot and make the player order very important during the step.

3) New Express Deck

Use only the following eight cards (two per player) instead of the regular twelve):

Bedauerlich – Change to, 'Give one half of your chocolate bars (rounded up, to the bank'.

Skandalos – unchanged.

Ruhrend – Change to 'pay \$3000 per employee to the bank'.

Schlapp – Unchanged.

Katastrophal – Unchanged.

Grosszugig – Change to, 'The player giving this card chooses which employee goes on vacation'.

Entsetzlich – Change to, 'Each salesman misses two meetings'.

Schmerzlich – Same as Grosszugig.

4) New Wirtschaftsdienst Card Deck

Add six more cards to this deck to make a total of 13. You'll probably have to make up a completely new deck so you won't be able to tell if a new card or an old card is coming up.

The suggested new cards are:

- 1) **Reduced unemployment** – No new workers may be employed next month.
- 2) **Secretaries go on strike** – No contracts may be processed next month.
- 3) **Cocoa crop damaged** – Minimum bids for cocoa next month is \$5,000 per bar.
- 4) **Chocolate glut** – Any contract for 50 or 60 Tonnen next month is discarded. Do not draw replacements.
- 5) **Increased demand** – There will be four extra meetings next month, beyond the normal maximum. All players must decide which to attend normally.
- 6) **Tax increase** – All players must reveal their cash on hand and then pay \$10,000 to the bank. Don't count wertpapier, unprocessed contracts, etc.

5) 5-8 Players

If two people have copies of the game, it should be no problem to play with 5-8 players. Just use the proportionate amount of pieces from both games, and allow each salesman to attend a number of meetings equal to the number of players.

*Although this article refers to the German edition, the game originated in France where it is known as **Ambition**, though the theme and production are exactly the same.*

The game is available in the UK through Just Games of London (Tel. (01) 437 0761) complete with an English translation. This translation is also available through GAMES INTERNATIONAL. Just drop us a line and enclose £1.00 to cover costs – Ed.

Alan R. Moon

MISSION TO THE MOON

A Staff Profile



Alan R. Moon

Because of a combination of illness and fear of flying, our American correspondent Alan R. Moon was unable to visit **ORIGINS**, so I decided to visit him on the way back from Milwaukee in his Massachusetts home, secure in the knowledge that, because of his aforementioned phobia, he'd never be able to return the compliment.

Alan, of course, is the former Avalon Hill wunderkind and ex. self-styled superstar of the Baltimore **Football Strategy** league.

Indeed, stories of his bizarre behaviour still circulate around Baltimore today. My own favourite tale concerns a column he used to write in the Avalon

Hill house magazine, the **General**, entitled *The Asylum*.

The entire column one month was devoted to a game called **Rommels Dungeon** which did not, of course, exist. The article was simply a spoof. A few years on when we had started to trade games, I asked him, as casually as possible, if he could find me a copy of the game. "No problem", he declared, perfectly straightfaced, "I think it was published by some company in Illinois".

Apart from contributing to the publication you are now reading, Alan claims to work for Parker Bros. who are based just a few miles away from the Moon residence. Personally I have my doubts about this. Most of his time seems to be spent lolling around the living room like a beached whale. Even his long suffering wife Denise now calls him 'whale belly'.

During my visit this lovely lady accidentally nudged one of his games with the vacuum cleaner. Jeez! From the ensuing rumpus anybody would have thought she'd just gambled away their life savings in an all night poker game.

When she's not cleaning up after avowed non-sexist Alan, Denise has to go and hunt for games for him at the

local jumble sales, and woe betide her if she returns empty handed.

To give Alan his due though, he has a keen fashion sense. When we went out to dinner he always made sure his trainers were the same colour. And what about the day he started 'work' at Parker Bros.?

In a desperate, though futile, attempt to impress the bigwigs, he went out and bought ten suits. The sales lady at the Salvation Army store where he bought them said she'd never seen anything like it. "At first I thought it was some hobo, but then he started pulling out all these one dollar bills and asking me to find him anything that matched. He kept mumbling about games too."

"Boy! was he weird."

Of the many delusions from which Alan suffers perhaps the most severe is that he's convinced that he's a good games player. During my visit I played quite a few games with him and his cronies. He managed to win one (to my four) and I am still receiving letters from him crowing about it.

Is this guy really going to write for us?

B.W.

DESERT ISLAND GAMES

We offer to give ten games of their choice to our staff and writers, providing they take off to a desert island and don't come back.

In the first of a continuing series, Mike Siggins takes to the oars.

The way life has been treating me recently, the thought of being marooned on a desert island is a very appealing one, especially if I am able to take some of my favourite games along. As ever, a Top Ten will always have some necessary omissions but the following represents a good cross section of my all-time greats.

Statis Pro Baseball (Avalon Hill) is a must. This game has given me hours of pleasure over the years, and given the potentially unlimited time available, I'm sure would continue to do so. Each replay baseball game has its fans and faults, and in this respect **Statis Pro** is no different, but for me it has always been the optimum combination of replay, excitement, and speed.

Railway Rivals (Rostherne Games) with a few extra maps, would also make the unplanned voyage. This game has grown on me ever since my first playing of it a couple of years ago, and was singularly responsible for showing me that a good game need not be a simulation. It is the only game that *all* my friends will ask me to play again, whereas most other games seldom have such all-round appeal.

Squad Leader (Avalon Hill) is an obvious choice and probably ranks as my all-time favourite boardgame. I have played this game more than any other by a considerable margin and then some, and while some of the scenarios fail to work, these are more than compensated for by the perfectly balanced ones that play so well. For me, the game represents the peak of gaming enjoyment. Avalon Hill also contribute the classic **Acquire**, a Sid Sackson design and a game which still surprises me with its range of tactical options, yet simple mechanics.

A recent favourite, and rather appropriate given my castaway status, is a Joe Balkoski design, **Sixth Fleet**

(Victory Games). This series of games has come in for some stick from some self-styled experts, but for me it represents a clean, stylish design which covers the complexities of modern naval warfare superbly well. The game system ensures that decision making is not affected by the rules and just allows players to get on with it.

Given the time to play, the campaign game would be marvellous.

In the out and out strategy area, no game approaches **Flat Top** (Avalon Hill) for atmosphere and suspense, thus ensuring its place among the palms. This game really is superb, with the two players planes sneaking back and forth across the board in search patterns, trying, not always successfully, to locate the all important carrier groups. The luxury of a third player acting as umpire would undoubtedly improve it another notch. This game, like the aforementioned **Sixth Fleet**, is a master of an inconspicuous game system that doesn't get in the way of play.

The next choice is easy as I have recently been converted to the classic simplicity of **Six Day Race** (Holtmann V.I.P.) by our esteemed editor. Apart from being such a clever little game the subject (cycling) is of great interest to me. A classic fill-in game for that spare hour or so before retiring to the hammock.

I would take **1830** (Avalon Hill) in the hope that it really does live up to its potential. I have only actually played the game once and a pleasurable experience it was too. In general I like railway games, and one that also involves stock market interest, as this does, has got to be a winner.

The next game is the superb **Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective** (Sleuth Publications). No game of any sort has made me think as quite as much as this one. The cases are tough to say the least. The atmosphere created by the game system is terrific and the game components are among the best around. The sole drawback is that the cases offer virtually no replay value. Once played, the game becomes shark fodder (they eat anything), unless some of the additional cases now available

can be air-freighted out (*no chance - Ed.*).

The beauty of being marooned would of course be the luxury of bountiful time and players. For this reason, I would be tempted to take one of the big games that promise so much, but which are not feasible at present owing to the limited amount of playing time which I have available. I would therefore have to choose between **Pax Britannica** (Victory Games), **Struggle Of Nations** (Avalon Hill), and **Empires In Arms** (Avalon Hill). As I've never played any of them the choice would not be easy, though on reflection I'd probably go for the former, if only to discover how the Chinese Rebellion Phase would go over on a desert island.

Mike Siggins

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Gone But Not Forgotten

The first in a series in which we look at classics from the not too distant past.

INFINITY

The cult game that didn't go on forever.

By David Parlett.

"If God had only thought up the general idea of the world, and then sub-contracted the work out, who would you sue?"

So asked *The Guardian* TV critic Nancy Banks-Smith in some other connection a few months ago, and the answer came to me – in the inevitable blinding flash of light – a short while later. You could try suing anyone who played *Infinity* – the game that invites you to "recreate the heaven and earth" in the privacy of your own home. You may not get anywhere with the lawsuit, but at least if you try the game yourself you will begin to appreciate some of the difficulties that might have been encountered by the unfortunate sub-contractor who landed the original celestial brief.

Creating the heaven and earth in real life, if that's the word for it, couldn't have been much fun anyway, what with Irish angels working on the 'lump', and building inspector St. Peter popping in and out on his clapped-out cloud to check that you were complying with all due requirements of The Building Regulations (Heaven and Earth) 4004BC. Date by courtesy of Archbishop Usher. And what about those bursts of donner-und-blitzen heralding the sudden appearance of the one great Job Architect to make sure you were not undermixing the planetary aggregate?

But what a marvellous idea for a boardgame. I wish I'd thought of it. Easy to see why the game acquired a cult status in its day until it's aficionado's inexplicably defected to *Dungeons and Dragons*. Not that there's anything wrong with *D&D* apart from the fact that it seems to go on forever. The original cosmos had taken six days to create, by divine reckoning, but the great merit of *Infinity* – the game of the book – is that it only takes about 45-60 minutes, which has always struck me as

the ideal length of time for any enjoyable activity.

The mechanics of play are dead simple – much simpler than they appear at first reading. In case you don't know already, the board represents a spiral galaxy with four arms set against the starry depths of space. Each arm consists of space into which playing tiles are to be placed during play. At each turn you build a sequence of tiles on to any one of the arms, so that throughout the game the arms of the galaxy grow, though at different speeds. Each tile depicts a cosmic, biological or cultural stage of universal evolution, and tiles must be placed along each arm in a particular sequence, namely; creation, galaxy, sun, planets (minimum two, maximum six), moons (optional), birth, and then 16 numbered 'life' tiles designated thus: Plants, animals, primates, man, intelligence, communication, tools, art, maths, science, humanities, industry, transit, atomic energy, space travel, and 'destiny'. You may not agree with the published order. I would have placed communication after tools, and intelligence some ways on after space travel; but let it pass.

Much pleasure derives from watching the galaxy grow, for, despite the rules of sequence, arms do not only grow at different rates but also follow different patterns – indeed, they are not all of the same length or pattern to start with. Sometimes an arm may not grow beyond the stage of creation; sometimes the complete sequence to 'destiny' finishes halfway round an arm; sometimes space runs out before 'destiny' is reached. Thus, each game represents a different unfolding of the universe, even though the same cosmological principles (or laws of nature as it were) are required to operate. Maybe this is why fantasy gamers abandoned it – *Infinity* is not fantasy, but imaginative reality.

The mechanism of play – drawing, playing, then discarding tiles – has been unfavourably likened to card games such as Rummy; which is fairly true, though Patience would be a better analogy. On the other hand, it has been

justifiably argued that such mechanics are entirely appropriate to the theme, for both Patience and the Cosmos may be regarded as exercises in the creation of order out of chaos. True, one could ask for more player interaction than *Infinity* provides – but it still provides more than Rummy, and that proves perennially popular.

At least you can attack other players with disaster tiles and, even more fun, black holes. And no little skill is required in the choice of victim and in the timing of such cataclysmic coups. But handle them carefully and be warned by this cautionary little tale:

**There was a young student at
Trinity,
Who enjoyed a good game of
Infinity,
So they prayed for his soul,
When he played a black hole,
And vanished from human
vicinity.**

Infinity was designed by Phil Orbanes, and published by Gamut of Games, R.I.P. in 1975.

This article first appeared in Games and Puzzles and is reprinted with permission.

Top Ten Games for the month of September.

**Kindly supplied by
Games Unlimited of
Kingston upon Thames.**

- 1) **Lost World** (Nova)
- 2) **Dark Future** (Games Workshop)
- 3) **Blood Bowl** (Games Workshop)
- 4) **Grass** (Executive Games)
- 5) **Talisman** (Games Workshop)
- 6) **Axis & Allies** (MB)
- 7) **Scrabble** (Spears)
- 8) **Armchair Cricket** (Armchair Adventures)
- 9) **DungeonQuest** (Games Workshop)
- 10) **How to Host a Murder** (Transatlantic Marketing)

GRID IRON GAMING

With Channel 4's American Football coverage just underway, Armchair Quarterback Mike Siggins looks at ways to play the game where the only thing that gets bruised is your ego.

In the last five years or so, basically due to Channel 4's innovative coverage, American Football has become an extremely popular television sport with viewers numbered in the millions. A major spin-off has been the appearance of hundreds of neophyte football teams around the country, all eager to wear that macho gear, hit hard and throw tight spirals.

Another spin-off, and one more relevant to this magazine, is that boardgame companies have finally caught on to the enthusiasm and are marketing games that enable the armchair player to recreate football drama off the field. Luckily, because of the ready made American market and the growing domestic output, we are now spoilt for choice in the Amfoot boardgame area. The main appeal of these games is that you can play them at any time you fancy a taste of football, even in the depths of the off season. The more detailed games enable play by play replays of your favourite team's season or the Superbowl, and the keenest of players can recreate whole NFL or college schedules with trading of players, injuries and full statistics.

As one would expect from the home of gridiron, America provides the best of the games available. The slight drawback that runs through all the American produced games is that they tend to assume a fair level of knowledge of the rules of the real game, especially on the complex penalty rules. Many potential gamers though will know enough to get by and the more obscure rules can be picked up as you go along. One way round it is to get hold of one of the many good books on the subject, or alternatively the excellent **Football Widow's Handbook** which is enclosed with the doyen of all gridiron games, **Football Strategy** (Avalon Hill). This game was first introduced in 1962 and has been a stalwart ever since, having a classic simplicity that has stood the test of time. Presentation is rather basic but does include everything needed to play the game including the standard Avalon

Hill football pitch board, yardage marker, charts, score sheets and rulebook.

The game revolves around a clever card matrix system which means each player has equal chances with luck playing a very minor role. For each down, the defence calls a play from a choice of ten types and places the appropriate card face down on the table. The offence then announces which of twenty attacking plays it will use, the card is flipped and the result is read off from the matrix resulting in a yardage gain or loss, fumbles, interceptions etc. Punting, field goals and penalties are all cleverly built into the matrix and the game takes around thirty to forty minutes to complete. The game is probably the most evenly balanced of all those reviewed and thus is very exciting, basically because each team uses one of two very similar generic matrixes

emphasising either the rushing or the passing game. There are no individual players or indeed team names so you get to make up your own. The rest is pure tactical decision making and out-thinking your opponent. Despite being the first sports game I purchased over ten years ago, **Football Strategy** remains, for me, the ultimate face to face football game and it is an ideal starting point for anyone trying this type of game for the first time.

At the other end of the complexity spectrum is **Statis Pro Football** (Avalon Hill) which is now available in its fifth edition. The game was first published in 1981 and, to be frank, it had a fair few rules problems. These now seem to be ironed out and the result is probably the most detailed, impressively presented and complex football game available. The game's main attraction is the massive pile of



over 1,000 individual player cards representing every player that appeared in the season covered; the 1987-8 set having just become available to join the historic sets going back to 1981. Each of the cards has a set of ratings applicable to the position played, so quarterbacks have passing and interception figures, linemen blocking and tackling ratings. The idea is, subject to the vagaries of NFL statistics that the ratings are based on, each player should perform as he did in the real season and, by extension, the entire team should have the same strengths and weaknesses. If you don't agree with the ratings supplied, it is simple enough to alter them but tampering too much can cause the game to unbalance. This system allows for close simulation of the season concerned and permits a wide range of realistic tactical options – so the Colts will use Dickerson for rushing because of his good rating, the Bills will be able to rely on Kelly for the big pass and their opponents will be taking steps to double cover, blitz or key on rushers accordingly. This is one of the few games that shows why linemen are important and it gives the fan plenty to get excited about as his favourite cornerback grabs that interception or Lawrence Taylor creams another running back. All this and much more, including solitaire play, is possible within the flexible game system but sadly there is a price. A typical game of *Statis Pro* will take at least three hours and sometimes as much as four. This is just about real time and while the game offers unmatched realism it may be that it goes on a little too long for all but the keenest player. *Statis Pro* is really one for the aficionados and the beginner would be best advised to steer clear of it until experienced in the less complex simulations.

If *Statis Pro* and *Football Strategy* represent the two extremes of the complexity range, *Paydirt* (Avalon Hill) falls somewhere in the middle and offers a good compromise on time, clocking in at about an hour for each game. Unlike *Statis Pro*, *Paydirt* has no individual players but it does differentiate between teams so the game provides twenty four double sided charts showing offence and defence for each NFL squad, again reflecting their strengths and weaknesses. The charts, like the cards in *Statis Pro*, are updated annually by the publishers. Fundamentally, the game is similar to *Football Strategy* in that the system

uses a matrix to decide the outcome of each down but the use of special dice adds a degree of luck, excitement and unpredictability. The charts themselves, unlike *Football Strategy*, are fairly difficult to analyse so there is a basic requirement to know the team you are playing and to use its strengths and to exploit the weaknesses of your opponent. The game is nicely presented and has a very smooth and interesting mechanism that has won many devoted fans. A good starting point and a fine design.

To rival the dominance of Avalon Hill's games there is the duo of football games from *Strat-O-Matic*, now widely available in the U.K. The two titles cover pro and college football and have basically similar systems. The complexity is around the *Paydirt* level and again uses a clever combination of charts and dice to determine play outcome. Charts are provided for NFL teams in the pro set and several prominent colleges from the many hundred active are supplied in the college version, allowing Army v Navy matchups and of course Rosebowl replays. The games play very quickly in just over the hour and use a fair amount of die rolling but the systems are clear and well designed and like the Avalon Hill games have a fanatical following. The components are very well made being of good card stock and the accessories are plentiful. Certainly worth a look though my personal preference does remain with the Avalon Hill collection.

(We would have liked to provide more information on the Strat-O-Matic games but unfortunately the UK distributor refused to co-operate with the preparation of this article – Ed.)

At the introductory level, *1st and Ten* published by Paradigm, a British company, is a fine game for complete novices or the younger gridiron fan. It is claimed to be suitable for seven year olds upwards and this seems to be about right though sadly there were no passing toddlers to try it out on. The box contains a nicely made stadium layout with sliders markers which show down, yardage, score and field position. The graphics are bright, clear and nicely done for a game of this sort and combined with the basic card playing system it makes for a quick game, high on playability but understandably lacking in realism. The game has had all the rough edges rounded off; penalties are greatly simplified, there is no need

to know the complex rules of the NFL and the yardage gains are rather larger than life. This all adds up to being a good, fun game and makes an ideal introductory game for the youngest fans.

Also loosely based on Amfoot is *Blood Bowl* (Games Workshop). This is a light-hearted game that uses the basic concepts of football such as passing, rushing and blocking and applies them to a violent scenario played between two fantasy teams – often orcs or the like. While sounding a bit naff, it does in fact play rather well and if it is taken purely as fun it stands up well as a beer and pretzels game. The components are up to the usual high Games Workshop standards and come in a large, loud box. The pitch is expanded polystyrene and looks the part, marked out in squares, plastic figures are supplied which are colour coded up to the colourful game charts, and an unambiguous and concise rule book rounds it all off. The game does have some rather violent tactics and injuries and luck play their part, but overall, strategy can be quite varied and it repays careful thought.

The above covers the widely available games but for those willing to dig a little further, there are many more games in the import and second hand markets that may be just what you are looking for. Worth looking out for are *Bowlbound* (Avalon Hill) which is the college version of *Paydirt*, *SPI Football* (SPI) which is an unusual design approach to the NFL game and also *Scrimmage* (SPI), a very old game that despite all its interesting rules must ultimately be considered a converted wargame with football players instead of tanks. There are also many games, produced by small specialist companies, that are available by mail order or from specialist outlets in the U.K. Many of these will be worth investigating as the player's interest increases. In addition, there will of course be new games appearing on the market all the time and it is hoped that the notable releases will be reviewed in later issues of *Games International*.

In summary, it seems that American football is here to stay. One presumes that the playing of the related boardgames is also a trend for the future. It is hoped that the descriptions of the above games is a useful grounding to help assess those currently available and among them, the prospective armchair quarterback should find one to suit.



GAMES FAIR COLLAPSE SHOCK!

The London Games Fair has collapsed in ignominy, (as opposed to acrimony) only two weeks before it was due to take place.

The crunch came when both Kenner-Parker-Tonka and San Serif, the two biggest exhibitors booked, both decided to cancel, leaving the organisers, Newbriton Ltd. little option but to pull the plug.

Peter Smith, head of marketing at KPT, issued a statement regretting the Fairs demise, and stressing that Kenner Parker agree that the idea of a Fair is an "excellent concept", and would be more than happy to offer their support should the occasion arise at a future date.

Their reasons for pulling out were due to what they perceived as a lack of appropriate promotion, and marketing ideas not being put "sufficiently in train".

San Serif also had reservations on this front, though in their case, what really finalised their decision to pull out was a story in Games Trade Monthly revealing a dispute over the actual ownership of the Fair between last years organiser Jack Jaffe, and Newbriton Ltd.

The upshot of all this is that the UK is now without any kind of games fair. A fact made all the more ironic by the awareness that at the end of this month the Essen Games Fair takes place in Germany. Last year this event attracted an attendance of over 65,000 people.

Newbriton organiser, Paul Dalton, has now left the company.

ARRIVERDICI ROMA

Yes, it's the final ciao to Italian games company International Team, who were

noted for producing beautiful looking games and terrible rules.

It seems the latter have caught up with them for they filed for bankruptcy in July. Perhaps the straw that broke the camels back was their new release this year **Generalowski** designed by the normally reliable Alex Randolph, but unfortunately this one was a real stinker.

But let us not speak ill of the dead. Let us instead observe a minutes silence for the makers of such gems like **Fief**, **Rally**, and **Roma**. Just don't mention the rules.

ASS

Embarrassing scenes recently at ASS, a medium sized games company in Stuttgart, Germany. The company recently published their annual report showing an extremely optimistic forecast which resulted in the share price of the company rocketing. Unfortunately they later discovered that the wrong set of figures had been accidentally published. When the news was announced, the share price plummeted passing the old price on the way down. Shortly after this the company received the Game of the Year award for **Barbarossa** which usually means guaranteed sales of at least 100,000. This news of course resulted in the share price going back up. Unfortunately, however, there was some doubt as to whether the company had the production capacity to cope with this volume so the share price went back down leaving investors in a state of understandable confusion.

LOCKED

Those of you who read a review of Columbia Games **East Front** in the **Wargamer** will be disappointed/amazed to learn that the game is not to be released, at least not in its present form.

The bigwigs at Columbia decided that the game was too complicated and not the sort of thing they want their 'block system' associated with.

The kiss of life is at hand though in the shape of Tom Dalgleish, Columbia Games supremo, who is at present reworking **East Front** into a simpler game.

WILD WEST END

West End Games are to release a new Civil War Quad game, **The War of the Rebellion** very shortly. Three of the games included in the package will be re-releases of **South Mountain**, **Chickamuga**, and **Battle of Shiloh**. The one game that has not been released before will be **Encounter at Gettysburg** which utilise the same system and will not be released separately. This is a pity because the whole caboodle will set you back \$60.00 (UK price not yet known). It does come in a tin though.

On The Way

FASA: Battletech 'Plas Tech-mechs' miniatures; **Warrior En Garde** vol.1 and **Warrior Riposte** vol.2; **Circus Imperium** boardgame for **Renegade Legion** (review next issue).

VICTORY GAMES: Tokyo Express.

AVALON HILL: West of Alamein (maybe); **Revolution** - expansion kit for **Kremlin**; **Statis Pro Baseball** 1987 player cards.

H.P. GIBSONS: Civilisation (with new mapboard).

SUPREMACY: Neutron Bombs and Killer Satellites plus **The Middle Powers** - two new expansion kits for **Supremacy**.

STEVE JACKSON GAMES: Conan beyond **Thunder River** - a new **Gurps** adventure; **AADA Road Atlas** and **Survival Guide Volume Five - The Midwest**.

ROSTHERNE GAMES: Slick - A new game based on oil production. New maps for **Railway Rivals**. For further details Tel. (06462) 2752.

ZODIAC GAMES: Zodiac Spells - President Reagan's favourite game repackaged (due in November).

SNIPER

GRIM'S FAIRY TALES

The September issue of *Games Trade Monthly* contains an ad for its sister publication *Games Review Monthly* (hereafter and forever known as **GRiM**) which claims that **GRiM** will be the "only review magazine published this autumn". It would seem therefore, that both ourselves and *Games Monthly* are simply products of our imagination. By a glorious irony the banner headline in the same edition of **GTM** reads "Oh! What a Whopper"

Nor was that the only whopper emanating from that quarter; last month a flyer was circulated to the trade which stated that Chriss (sic) Hunt and Alan Moon would both be writing for **GRiM**. To the best of my knowledge both are gainfully employed by this magazine and have no intention of knowingly contributing anything to **GRiM**. The 'knowingly' in this context is quite important, for **GRiM** did publish a piece by Chris in their first issue on **MANORCON**, an event which occurred several months ago. This article was published in **GTM** and then reprinted in **GRiM** without his knowledge. At least though, they managed to spell his name correctly this time.

GRiM also contains an interview with *Shogun* designer Mike Grey which is mysteriously uncredited. I can exclusively reveal that the interview was conducted by yours truly when in the employ of **GTM**.

Nietzsche once said "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger", after reading **GRiM** I can see what he meant.

BRITISH STEEL

Lest all this sounds rather unsporting let's offer a warm welcome to two other games publications launched recently. **GM** and *Games Monthly* who like ourselves (?) both produced colourful first issues.

Games Monthly is edited by Steve Nicholls who apparently also works for the British Steel Corporation. At least I think that's what the B.S.C. stands for that he always puts after his name. The contents of his mag seem to focus on games like *Shogi* and other such esoterica, as well as many adverts for his own companies and the next issue – including the same full-page advert twice.

GM, on the other hand is co-edited by Wayne who has no initials at all. Perhaps his first name is John? As the title implies, **GM** is pitched firmly at Role-Players and PBM gamers. Both these mags are filling a niche in the market and we wish them the best of luck. But not too much.

ORGIES – THE LAST TEMPTATION

It seems that our moral guardians have now given up the ghost (!) against 'The Last Temptation of Christ' and turned their attention to the boardgame *Orgy*. London Transport report that several of the posters advertising the game have been defaced and now have to be protected by a glass screen.

LT themselves are not above the odd outbreak of moral puritanism for it was they who banned the poster for 'The Last Temptation'.

After agreeing to display *Orgy*'s 'Bring Your Mates' ad. I thought they'd seen the light, as it were.

Ooh-La-La

The designer of *Ogallala*, Rudi Hoffman, writes to offer his views on *Games Workshop's Chaos Marauders*, a game which many have remarked bears a striking similarity to Rudi's own, though was credited to Stephen Hand. *Ogallala* is better known in the UK as *Blackfoot*, which was published under license by Waddingtons from Pelikan some fifteen years ago.

The current issue of the influential German magazine *Die Poppel Revue* carries an article pointing out, in no uncertain terms, the many rules which the games seem to have in common.

Rudi though is philosophical about the matter, he thinks the rules for **CM** are "too long and complicated" for the German market. He goes on to say that *Ogallala* is to be republished in Germany by the Hess (no relation) group in Munich sometime next year.

ROLE PLAYERS ATE MY BABY (part 39)

Couch potatoes among our readership may have seen the appalling American made-for-TV movie *Mazes and Monsters* on Channel 4 recently.

For those lucky enough to miss it the 'plot' concerns four American college students who dabble in role playing ('level 9' we are told). They are played by the usual anodyne brat pack types, and barely before the credits have left the screen I find myself hoping that they will all die painfully (but quickly).

Unfortunately all that happens is that one of them goes completely off his rocker because of the influence of the game, thus proving to millions that role playing can damage your health.

One of the actors in this tripe is Tom Hanks, who has since gone on to become quite a star. Guess he must have left this one off his C.V.

MURPHY RULES OK?

One of the best laughs around at the moment is the book published by Steve Jackson Games, *Murphy's Rules*, a collection of rulebook cock-ups intentional and otherwise.

Steve tells me that the book is essentially a 'labour of love', and that while they would love to publish such a collection more frequently "there is only so much humour around".

The illustrations in the book are by some of America's top cartoonists like the Pulitzer Prize winner Ben Sargent.

My favourite is probably TSR's attempt to trademark the term 'Nazi' in their *Indiana Jones* module, while Alan Moon cites a rule from SPI's *Sniper* – "An erect man may not expose himself".

Other submissions gratefully received.

B.W.



TEXT AND PHOTOS: BRIAN WALKER

If you're going to hold a convention, hold it somewhere where there are few distractions. So where better than Milwaukee? A concrete tomb on a lake some two hundred miles or so north of Chicago in the cultural and culinary void known as the Mid-West. Hullo, the Wisconsin State Tourist Office? yes of course, I'd love to write your visitors guide.

In the case of **ORIGINS/GENCON** though, if JR himself had been offering free shares in Ewing Oil on the steps of the convention hall (called Mecca, appropriately enough) I suspect he wouldn't have distracted any of the 10,000 plus who attended, such was the dedication and enthusiasm of the madding crowd.

This was the first coming together of the hitherto diametrically opposed conventions. Wargamers, Role-players, Boardgamers, all living peacefully together under one roof for three action packed days. Or it could have been four, for no one seemed quite sure when it actually started, least of all the organisers.

I arrived on the Thursday evening and everything seemed to have been in full swing for at least a day though the con was not advertised to start until tomorrow!

The following morning sees your jet-lagged hack crawling out of the hotel into the 100 yards of space between it and the convention hall proper. A space densely populated with gamers of all shapes and sizes, usually in possession of a brightly coloured box. Finally, into the centre itself; on the ground floor there are three large halls; two for miniatures and peripherals, and one for trade stands, which the natives refer to as the 'dealer area'. No nonsense about conceptually designed stands here, just

a few trestles strung together with the accent on sell, sell, sell, in the great American tradition.

THE MERCHANTS OF BALTIMORE

Upon entering this arena of commerce the first stand I visit is that of Avalon Hill. And why not? Especially as they are paying for this trip.



*Don Greenwood (standing) launches the **Enemy in Sight** tournament. Dr Vinny the Ninny (2nd from right) gets the giggles.*

For so long AH have been the market leaders in strategy gaming but the past couple of years have been lean ones, despite the consistent quality of their products. The games which they were debuting at **ORIGINS/GENCON** looked stronger than ever but will they return the company to their glory days? Of these new releases **Enemy in Sight** looked to have the right stuff. A fun card game which is really a sophisticated version of their earlier **Naval War**, the object of which is to sink, or capture your enemies ships (for a fuller description see review).

This time though, the period is Napoleonic, so it's broadsides and boarding parties. Don Greenwood, who developed the game, was running a tournament downstairs which proved to be very popular. And who should appear in the final but the legendary Avalon Hill groupie, Dr. Vinny the Ninny. Somewhat calmer these days but

still insane. Vinny's a dentist in real life but he likes to keep it quiet. Don't worry Vinny, mum's the word.

Kremlin (see review) has only been out for a couple of months in the States but already there is an expansion kit; the Historical Revolutionary Variant would you believe comrade? This consists of a new set of character cards based on real politicians like Trotsky and Lenin, together with new rules to accommodate them which we will be looking at in the next issue. Reaction to the game was good from gamers I spoke to, once they had got over the fact it was not a **Stalingrad** variant.

That's quite enough syncophancy for now though, so let's look at the long awaited **Merchant of Venus** (review to follow in next issue) which was finally on show and featuring truly hideous cover art. What wrong can science fiction have perpetrated on the artist for him to have taken revenge in such a devastating manner. The components look real nice though and the word on the floor was that this was a winner. The game was designed by Richard 'Magic Realm' Hamblen. He also wrote the rulebook.

On the Wargames front the latest **Advanced Squad Leader** module **West of Alamein** made it's debut and outsold everything. The new **Gettysburg** designed by the estimable Craig Taylor also premiered. This is an excellent introductory level wargame that has only one A4 sheet of rules, so even I can play.

One of the highlights of **GENCON** has always been the costume competition and this year there was no shortage of imaginative attire. My nomination went to Avalon Hill's resident redneck Rex Martin for his Cisco Kid outfit, replete with cigar and a huge badge proclaiming "IF WE BRING IN GUN CONTROL HOW ARE WE GONNA KILL THE LIBERALS?". At this point I begin to feel like Henderson Dores in William Boyd's *Stars and Bars*. It wasn't until much later that I was advised it was not a costume.

SPACE 1988

If Avalon Hill had the strongest range of new releases then the game that attracted the most singular interest must have been **Space 1889**. Unfortunately, due to production problems, the first game in the planned

series – **The Sky Galleons of Mars** was not on sale, though there were several demo copies floating around, as it were. The scenario is set in a world where Edison could bump into Flash Gordon in a Martian pub, for according to the blurb the old Prof. sailed off to Mars in a balloon but was captured by the hostile natives. Queen Victoria's Royal Navy sets sail into deep space using the technology (?) of the era, unaware that the creatures released the old boffin when they realised how brainy he was. Ever since then the Martians have been convinced that half the human race is deaf.

The game is superbly detailed and in keeping with the current trend comes with 3-D plastic bits. In the New Year there will be a complete role-playing system plus the second boardgame **Ironclads and Ether Flyers**. This series will be huge, and who deserves the success more than GDW?

Lots of companies talk of supporting the hobby but GDW put their money where their mouth is. A few months ago a friend of mine sent them a cheque for eight copies of their introductory wargame **Battle for Moscow** which was scheduled as a tournament at his local games club. Imagine his surprise therefore, when he not only got his cheque back along with the eight games, but also received a package of tournament materials including \$40 worth of GDW gift certificates, 4 copies of their magazine **CHALLENGE** to be used as additional prizes, plus forms and info on how to organise the tournament.

Their new wargame **The Great Colonial War**, contains a copy of **Battle for Moscow**, as well as a very useful booklet containing a history of the company and a section on recommended wargames which, with typical generosity, does not just include their own products. I should add that GDW did not pay me a dime to gush like this. They didn't even buy me a burger. Not that I didn't ask.

TSR/IRS

No games convention would be complete without a few rumours and at this one there were a couple of whoppers. The first of which concerned TSR and suggested that they are battling the Dark Lords of the IRS.

The story goes that they have been deducting taxes for "research and



development" for many years now. Following an audit the IRS got wind of this and advised the company that such deductions could only be made in lieu of scientific or space research (I guess their new Buck Rogers game doesn't qualify).

Weekly visits to Washington ensued in an attempt to get the ruling overturned, but if Al Capone couldn't achieve it what chance TSR?

On a less contentious front TSR premiered **Dragonlance**, and **Buck Rogers – Battle for the 25th Century**, both featuring 3-D pieces.

The word on the former was not good, and rather ominously two copies of the game appeared in the auction the following day. **Buck Rogers** is a different story altogether and tremendous value at the price – I saw a copy in Toy's R Us retailing for \$18.99. The rules though contain a rather unusual victory condition, to wit: "Point out the futility of your opponents position and convince them to surrender". Say whaaaaaa! Sounds like another candidate for Steve Jackson's **Murphy's Rules**.

But when TSR, are you going to release **The Bullwinkle and Rocky Role-Playing Game** in the UK?

BLOOD BUCKS

By common agreement the fastest growing games company in the US is Games Workshop, and their stand reflected this with sold out notices on many of their products. Avalon Hill



Full steam ahead in the third edition of **Empire Builder**

president Eric Dott spoke rather disparagingly of their 'punk gaming', but could not deny the impact which they are making.

Blood Bowl attracted a lot of interest, unsurprisingly for in spite of its fantasy theme the game can also double as a passable simulation of American Football. **Warhammer 40k** has also grabbed the hearts and minds of young America this year.

On the FASA stand it was very much a case of lunch with the lions: In their new chariot racing game, **Circus Imperium**, horses have been replaced by the Kings of the Jungle. Quite what Lester Piggot

would say I don't know, but for sure he'd probably go easy on the whip.

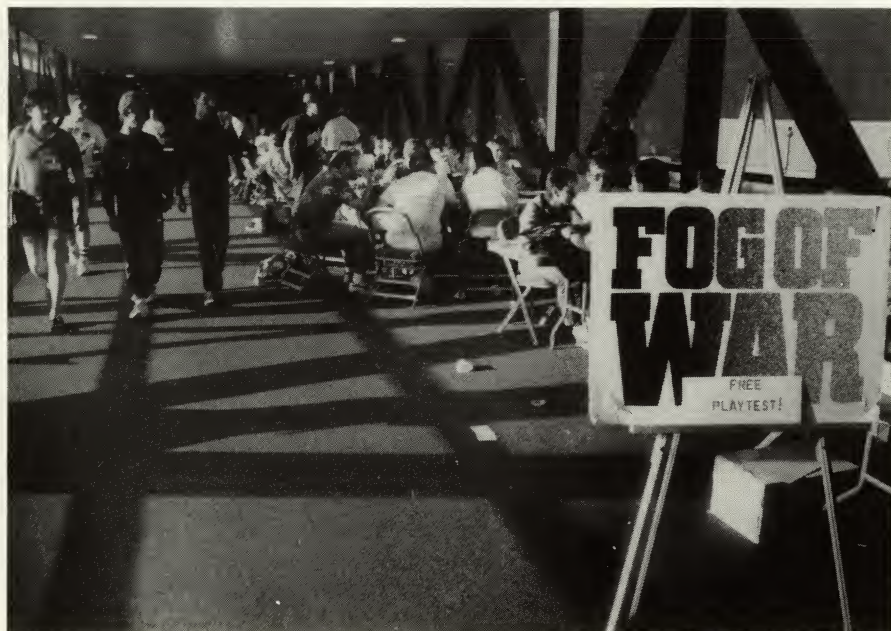
It is strongly recommended that you try to stay in your chariot unless you want to end up as the third tier in a cub's sandwich. For the lions' love of eating comes second to only one thing, and we all know what that is.

The game is set in the future and one can just picture the scene: A vast arena somewhere in the Mid West, packed with strung out hooligans clutching cans of alcohol free scotch. A shrill monotone beats out from the tannoy; "Spectators are advised for their own safety not to enter the arena. The management cannot accept responsibility if you, or your spouse, is eaten. Have a nice day."

If you like to have the occasional flutter, then put a few bob on **Circus Imperium** for it looks a winner according to our man with one arm and no legs (he answers to the name of 'Lucky').

The rest of FASA's stand was dominated by the best selling **Battletech**, **Aerotech**, and all the other tech, but strangely there was no sign of the four new boardgames based on the novels of James 'Shogun' Clavell.

Mayfair Games looked busy, due in the most part to their repackaged **Empire Builder**, the classic railway game for which Mayfair's Chief Engineer Darwin Bromley is running a tournament. The main difference in the new edition is the



inclusion of a plastic tray in which to keep all the loads, plus a better box with splendid artwork. Devotees of this game will be interested to note that Mayfair were playtesting a new European map which they hope to release sometime next year.

LOADSAGAMES

The gaming areas upstairs are bursting at the seams. I almost crush a 75mm battle cruiser underfoot as continue my trek, determined to leave no box unopened. The legendary **ORIGINS** auction is upstairs also, and it is here where most of the true insanity occurs. Speaking of which; who should I bump into on the way in but Matthias Stobbe from Berlin. Herr Stobbe manages Germany's most famous games shop, DAS SPIEL. As usual, he looks like a refugee from a Fassbinder movie. How's it going Matty, still arguing about the third goal?

Matthias clutches the box he is holding even tighter. "I've just paid \$100 for **Campaign for North Africa** and it is completely unplayable" he giggles. I left him with the more mundane problem of how he was going to ship all his new purchases back to the bunker in Berlin.

The superficially calm nature of the auction itself belied the chaos lurking beneath the surface. The structure of it is; you bring a game you want to sell and obtain a ticket. On this you write the reserve price before handing it back to the auctioneer and obtaining a receipt. The game then joins a veritable



*All the dice you've ever needed
from The Armoury.*

ORIGINS AWARDS

Best Historical Figures Series

Shogun Hard Guys, Ral Partha Enterprises
Sculptors, Dennis Mize & Bob Charette

Best Fantasy and Science Fiction Figure Series

Julie Guthrie's Fantasy Line, Grenadier Models
Sculptor, Julie Guthrie

Best Vehicular or Accessory Series

Star Trek Miniatures, FASA Corp
Sculptors, Randy Hoffa & Steve Apollini

Best Miniature Rules

Harpoon, Game Designers Workshop
Designer, Larry Bond

Best Roleplaying Rules

Star Wars West End Games Inc
Designer, Greg Costikyan

Best Roleplaying Adventure

Tournament of Dreams, Pendragon, Chaosium Inc
Designers, Sam Shirley, Les Brooks & Greg Stafford

Best Roleplaying Game Supplement

Star Wars Sourcebook, Star Wars, West End Games Inc.
Designers, Curtis Smith & Bill Slavicsek

Best Graphic Presentation of a Roleplaying Game, Adventure or Supplement

Miskatonic University Kit, Call of Cthulhu, Chaosium Inc
Graphic Designer, Lynn Willis

Best Pre-20th Century Boardgame

Shogun, Milton Bradley Company
Designer, Mike Grey

Best Boardgame Covering the Period 1900-1946

Scorched Earth, Game Designers Workshop
Designer, John Astell

Best boardgame Covering the Period 1947-Modern Day

Team Yankee, Game Designers Workshop
Designers, Marc Miller & Frank Chadwick

Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Boardgame

Arkham Horror, Chaosium Inc
Designers, Richard Launius, Lynn Willis & Charlie Krank

Best Graphic Presentation of a Boardgame

Shogun, Milton Bradley Company
Graphic Designers, Alec Jutsum & Charles Brenner

Best Play-By-Mail Game

Alamaze, Pegasus Productions

Best Professional Adventure Gaming Magazine

Computer Gaming World, Golden Empire
Editor, Russel Sipe

Best Amateur Gaming Magazine

Polyhedron, TSR Inc
Editor, Jean Rabe

Hall of Fame

Greg Stafford

Special Award for Outstanding Achievement

The Dragon TSR Inc

Special Award for Outstanding Achievement

The Courier
Editor, Dick Bryant

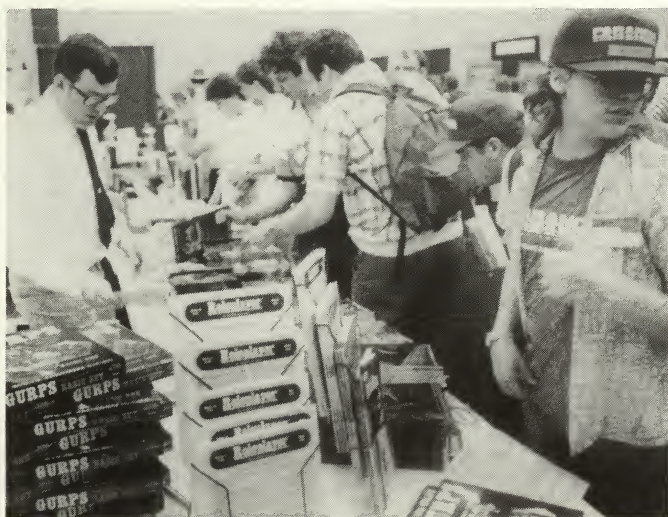


Carry On Sailing

mountain of homeless games where it will remain until called for by the auctioneer who will then endeavour to find a careful and loving owner for it. At the end of the weekend you present your receipt and collect the amount the game fetched. So much for theories; at the close nobody seemed to know who had bought what, or for how much. Nobody's fault really, it was a case of death by cardboard, as the number of games swelled to completely unmanageable proportions.

TALKING HEADS

Gaming celebrities like fellow limey Donald Featherstone (historian and military expert) and Rowena Morrill (fantasy artist) have started to arrive to join in the various seminars on offer.



Crush Wars on the Steve Jackson stand.

Don Greenwood from Avalon Hill is presenting one on **Advanced Squad Leader** to an enthralled audience, while Science Fiction writer Andrew Offut chairs a discussion of various aspects of the genre. Or, if none of that grabs you then how's about The Inaugural World Boardgaming Olympics? A two day event featuring games such as **Sniper, Nato, Persian Gulf, Chickamuga, and Frederick The Great.**

Failing that there's always Clayorama, a sort of modelling equivalent of The Gong Show. Contestants are each given fifteen minutes to sculpt a monster, and the creations that are considered unworthy are not gonged out, but despatched by a flailing mallet. Cruel, cruel, world.

Star Fleet Battles have commenced downstairs right next to the **Advanced Squad Leader** and **Paranoia** tournaments. A further example of the eclectic nature of the convention; something for just about everybody who is interested in gaming. The doors close at 10pm each night but this proves no deterrent to the truly obsessed as they troop over the road to set up at the adjacent Hyatt Regency Hotel, much to the alarm of the polyester business set.

If one were to draw any conclusions from **ORIGINS/GENCON** it would be along the lines of "I have seen the future and it is made of plastic". GDW, TSR, and Games Workshop have all gone down the road that the legions of Milton Bradley's **Gamesmaster** series helped build. Cardboard counters, your days are numbered.

ORIGINS '89 will be held at the Los Angeles Airport Hilton Hotel, June 29 - July 2. Start California dreaming now. This is an event you really shouldn't miss.

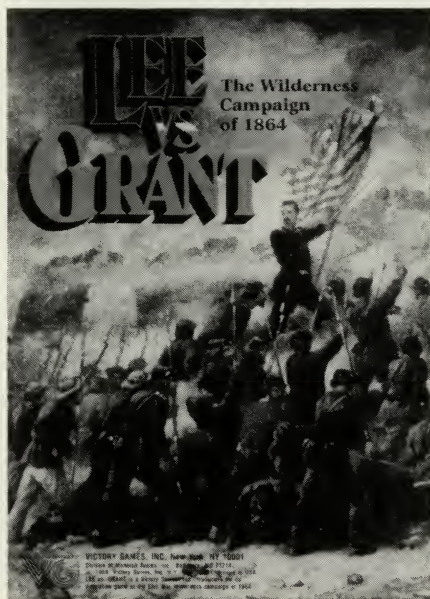
WAR GAMES

LEE vs. GRANT

DESIGNED BY
JOE BALKOSKI

PUBLISHED BY
VICTORY GAMES

PRICE £17.95



Boring as it must appear to the merely competent designers out there, Joe Balkoski has turned in another goody. Can this man do no wrong?

In an area often plagued by mediocrity, this is another highly playable, interesting and thought provoking game from my current favourite designer. I suspect that it is also historically accurate unfortunately the American Civil War is not an area on which I have read extensively, which many would argue precludes me from reviewing this game. Nuts to you.

Lee vs. Grant covers the wilderness campaign of 1864. The box contains a single large map, 520 nicely printed counters, charts, counter tray and one rules booklet. All the components are up to the usual high Victory standards.

The game is strategic in scope: units are divisions and corps, and the turns represent five days. The map is heavily geared to railroads and the road network which link the all-important crossroads and towns. The game is about gaining objectives; the cavalry race around grabbing vital points on the map while the slow but steady infantry trudge up behind to hold them. Outflanking, Mosby-style raiding, and fluid play are the order of the day.

The heart of the game is leadership. The leader counters of both sides are named and have a small image of the commander concerned. Each leader, both of cavalry and infantry, is rated for his command value which effects movement allowance but not combat. The troops under each command are shown as strength markers which can be stacked under the leaders or held off the map in holding boxes. I found this a little unclear, not that it matters greatly. The strength markers have two sides, organised and disorganised. Both sides show the 'manpower' factor which is the actual number of troops present (each factor representing one brigade of 2500 men) and also the combat factor which is roughly 50% of the manpower strength if disorganised.

Most of the basic scenarios have only one turn, but these are split into three action phases of movement and combat. Combat is performed as a part of movement, as is the all-important burning of railroad stations both of these actions cost additional movement points. Movement point allowances are determined by the roll of dice plus the leader's command rating. Cavalry roll two dice and infantry one. Both can force march, allowing further movement points, but this results in disorganised troops at the end of the phase: these then fight at reduced strength but retain full movement powers. When a commander has moved, he is flipped to his fatigued side which remains until the end of the phase. The choice then is either to un-fatigue the leader allowing movement in the following phase, or to re-organise his troops back to full

strength. Commanders who do not move and are not fatigued can entrench. There are slightly unconventional rules for zones of control with larger forces having stronger zones than small detachments and the presence of roads also plays a part.

The main feature of the game, designed to simulate the unpredictable nature of Civil War combat, is the initiative system. It is also what gives the game its highly interactive nature neither player sits idle for long because initiative is by unit rather than by side. The Confederates normally get first initiative from the scenario rules, but after that the players roll to determine which unit will move next. Thus it is possible for most of the enemy to move before you or vice versa and, like **Sixth Fleet**, it encourages one to choose the most pressing unit to activate. The result is a fast, attack/counterattack type of game with unpredictable events which I found to my liking.

Only the active unit can initiate combat, though die modifiers are available from supporting adjacent leaders. The system is straightforward, comparing the two combat strengths to produce a ratio which is adjusted with die roll modifiers.

The Union advantage in artillery is neatly factored in by allowing bonuses for Rebs fighting in forests and reductions in clear terrain. Cavalry holding a position are no match for an infantry force and have an option to execute fighting withdrawals.

Advanced rules cover, amongst other things, supply, reinforcements, random events, and loss of leaders. All of which, as may be expected, add to both the flavour and playing time.

There are six basic game scenarios ranging from the small introductory to the substantial. In addition, there are three advanced game scenarios that combine to make up the full campaign game. The mixture is good, with some scenarios suited to a quick hour-long game while others offer grander strategic problems. My only other

comment about the scenarios is related to something I noticed in the **6th Fleet** series of games.

It seems that Mr Balkoski, when dealing with small scenarios, is falling into a technique which is a little odd, though I may have worked out the answer. Those of you familiar with **6th Fleet** will recall the scenario restriction where a start hex and game length are given which dictate that a convoy or taskforce has to make a beeline for its objective, and can just make it in time providing it steams ahead at maximum speed, and in a straight line. This strikes me as rather strange, and the same restriction is repeated in **Lee vs. Grant** where you think you have a strategic problem only to find two of your corps having to charge down roads or similar. This doesn't apply to campaigns of course, but not everyone will want to play those. The only explanation for this design trick is that the corps or convoys in question had orders to proceed with undue haste, or that their leaders were just plain uninspired in the actual campaign itself.

The rules are laid out very carefully with examples and relevant designer's notes which often contain useful historical notes.

Although quite large, the rulebook makes for enjoyable reading and something of an educational exercise. Not only can one see how a rule operates, but also why. I came away knowing much about the wilderness campaign, which is essential if you are going to appreciate just why the campaign was so important.

The brief comments in the rulebook are backed up by more detailed historical and geographical notes in a separate section at the back of the booklet. The only assumption one needs to make is that Balkoski's historical notes are well researched, but given the man's track record I am willing to take the chance.

I acknowledge that his approach may reek of 'instant history', but it offers so much more than the average game that I will take this style any day in preference to the stodgy history lessons churned out by *S&T*. Indeed I would

suggest that this simplified approach be applied to more obscure conflicts like the Indian Mutiny, or the Boer War. It will be interesting to see how SPI/WWW handle this in their upcoming games on these subjects.

You will have gathered by now that I like **Lee vs. Grant**. Some of the game system may be a trifle unusual, but overall it is a fresh, vital treatment of an area that has formerly held little interest for me. It plays quickly, the counter density is low, and it has high player interaction like its **6th Fleet** cousin. It also offers plenty of decision making, and, unusually for an historical game, educates as it plays. It is also admirably suited to solitary play if that is your bag. My only complaint, and it is minor, is that I would have welcomed some easy way of having actual unit names (e.g. Louisiana Zouaves) instead of the simple manpower factors I am a sucker for chrome like this even though it slows the game down a tad.

M.S.

OPEN FIRE

DESIGNED
BY GERARD KLUG

PUBLISHED BY
VICTORY GAMES

PRICE £27.95

OPEN FIRE



If you are enamoured of the **Ambush** paragraph system and have dreams about driving a tank, this is the game for you, especially if you can't find opponents, for like its aforementioned predecessor, this is primarily a solitary game although there is a two-player (co-operative) option.

If you don't fall into either of those categories, or should you be totally unaware of what the **Ambush** paragraph system is, don't worry, help is at hand.

The game arrives in a box which contains all manner of printed matter including 210 die cut counters and an unmounted paper map measuring 32" x 22", plus of course a 32 page rulebook which includes the missions and a reprint of the counter sheet (both sides). The components represent a considerable upgrade from **Ambush**, especially the map, which is tastefully coloured.

The rules are clear though not entirely error free, a point which we will elaborate on later. A thorough reading is recommended before you attempt a mission, unless you want to start off lost that is. To start, you pick one of the six

missions available and read the mission briefing, placing event markers on the map according to the briefing. You now generate your tank platoon by die rolls, a method quite familiar to role-players, and record the results on the platoon record sheet provided and move the units onto the map as instructed in the briefing. As an alternative you may use the pre-generated platoon provided in the rulebook. Whichever method you use you will now find that you have 'platoon and vehicle quality points' which you can spend on more men and vehicles.

As the mission progresses the status of your vehicles, number of sightings, and victory points gained, is marked-up on the platoon record sheet.

Open Fire uses a game system which has two modes; when there are no 'active germans' on the map you are in 'operations', and when there are, then you are in 'action rounds', or simply 'rounds'. Each time you move a US unit into a hex allowing a clear line of sight (LOS) to a hex containing an event marker then a 'paragraph check' is called for. This is done by inserting the mission cartridge into the sleeve. Depending on a variety of factors a

paragraph number may, or may not, appear in the sleeve window. If such a number does appear then you refer to the corresponding paragraph in the booklet provided. If you get a result activating a German unit then you are in rounds, otherwise, continue operations.

During operations, movement is restricted to one hex at a time possibly followed by a paragraph check if your vehicle has LOS to an event marker. A vehicle can change its open/closed (buttoned up) status, and a squad or equipment can be exchanged between vehicles. Being 'buttoned up' affects movement, combat, and LOS. A vehicle's hexagonal turret marker is turned over to reflect it's open/closed condition, but this can only be done after any required paragraph checks have been completed. Other checks during operations include activation, perception (important if you want to stay alive), sightings, random events, and initiative (perception checks for Germans).

When a German unit receives a turn during the action sequence he must act according to his Unit Characteristics Card and the read-out from the paragraph booklet. Possible German actions include movement (you choose direction and speed), close assault, self-preservation (head for the hills), broken (!), and surrender.

To succeed on a mission you need to acquire victory points. These are obtained in various ways according to the mission being played, but you will always lose 3 victory points per US unit destroyed.

The missions vary in play quality with the first probably being the best and the fourth probably being the weakest. The replay value is inevitably questionable in a game system of this kind.

Some compensation can be gained from the fact that **Open Fire** makes for an excellent campaign game as you guide your platoon through thick and thin, and, as with **Ambush**, there will

undoubtedly be expansion modules to follow.

The price is a bit steep at £27.95 though this is due in some part to the American origins of the game. There is an incredible amount of detail on the cards if you are looking for a justification for shelling out that much. If you do buy the game then you are entitled to feel slightly disgruntled by some errors/omissions in the rules, so take heed Victory Games, we need some answers:

1) On the display sheet the GP effect table has columns 8-12 one row too high.

2) The main gun firing arc is stated as being 60 degrees, but the fire zone diagram in the same rules paragraph shows it to be 120 degrees.

3) Aircraft attacks who fires first?

4) Ammunition rules are vague the pre-generated platoon doesn't have any! Must the first mission be played as a campaign to get extra ammo?

5) Weapon skill and its effect on GP fire is not defined.

6) Paragraph 505 instructs unit to "button up and drive fast", yet these are supposed to be mutually exclusive.

7) What is the charge assault bonus for vehicles?

Most of these errors are merely irritating and do not detract from what is basically a good game system, though for the price you would expect the rules to be a bit more polished and the missions to be better thought out.

The game should have some appeal to role-players because of the identification with characters, and if Victory could throw in a few tank-driving Orcs in the expansion modules then the sales potential of the game could know no bounds.

B.W. (with help from Derek Wilson and Ian Brown).

THE YEAR SO FAR

AIR SUPERIORITY (GDW)

Excellent game of modern warfare well up to GDW's usual standard.

DRIVE ON FRANKFURT (Counterattack magazine #1)

Quite simply the best game to appear in a magazine ever.

RAF (West End)

Highly recommended solitaire Battle of Britain game.

SEVENTH FLEET (Victory Games)

Welcome addition to the fleet series.

WARGAMES Top 20

- 1) **Imperium Romanum** (West End)
- 2) **Battletech** (FASA)
- 3) **Combined Arms** (GDW)
- 4) **Air Superiority** (GDW)
- 5) **Star Warriors** (West End)
- 6) **Centurions** (FASA)
- 7) **Harpoon 2** (GDW)
- 8) **RAF** (West End)
- 9) **Air Strike** (GDW)
- 10) **Ambush** (Victory Games)
- 11) **Advanced Squad Leader** (Avalon Hill)
- 12) **Squad Leader** (Avalon Hill)
- 13) **Chieftain** (GDW)
- 14) **Starship Combat** (FASA)
- 15) **7th Fleet** (Avalon Hill)
- 16) **Johnny Reb** (GDW)
- 17) **City Tech** (FASA)
- 18) **Interceptor** (FASA)
- 19) **Third Reich** (Avalon Hill)
- 20) **Panzer Blitz** (Avalon Hill)

Chart supplied courtesy of *Virgin Games*.

TAC-AIR

DESIGNED BY
GARY MORGAN

PUBLISHED BY
AVALON HILL

PRICE £22.95

*** $\frac{1}{2}$



Tac-Air is subtitled "The game of Modern Air/Land Battles in Germany", and for once the blurb is fairly accurate. It is primarily a two-player game which deals with hypothetical contemporary conflict in the area of Southern Germany around the Main River between Bamberg and Bayreuth. The responsibility for this area lies with the United States VII Corps.

The game scale is one nautical mile per hex, with a turn representing three hours, with eight turns to the day. Ground units represent battalions and air units represent flights of 2/4 aircraft.

The game has the same origins as the best selling **Flight Leader**, also published by Avalon Hill. Both were originally designed by a United States Air Force Major for training the military and sold as commercial products to Avalon Hill where they were developed by the excellent Craig Taylor. Whereas **Flight Leader** concentrated on air to air combat, **Tac-Air** concerns itself with the interaction of ground and air forces.

A sustained effort has been made to make the game accessible to beginners.

A basic rules folder, totalling four pages, is provided. After careful perusal a player of average board gaming experience should be able to set up and play through the introductory scenario which is provided. This scenario depicts units of the Warsaw Pact 22 Motorised Rifle Regiment attempting to capture Drocsehseckigdor (!) from the United States 2nd Armoured Cavalry Regiment. The Soviets have a couple of MIG 29 fighters in support, whereas the NATO player has two F16's, and two A10's in the air. The number of units involved is small and this basic scenario is well worth replaying until players become familiar with the game system.

The advanced rules only amount to a further five pages. Even if one takes into account the player aids (i.e. charts and tables) the game is easily manageable, and nobody should be put off by the complexity of the rules. The text on the back of the player cards provide detailed examples of play, a trend which more companies would do well to follow.

Readers may be surprised that this is such a playable game, given the complexity of the theme. The rub is, that in order to make the game playable, drastic simplifications have had to be made. This of course takes us into playability vs. realism territory, which, as usual, is a matter of personal taste.

Each game consists of a number of preparatory steps followed by a manoeuvre phase, and then an air phase. During the preparatory steps, each side sorts out its missions for air units, then carries out other functions, such as trying to remove disruptions and re-supplying air defence units.

The Manoeuvre phase relates to ground units (including helicopters). Each side moves all of their units and carries out combat, and this is then repeated by the opposition. Combat is mandatory between adjacent ground units which are not disrupted by two levels or more.

The Air phase consists of ten identical air rounds. During each round, the first side gets to move every one of their units (resolving any combats which may arise), the other side then follows.

Accordingly, the sequence of play harks back to the early days of wargaming: "I move, I fight. You move, you fight". There is no opportunity to intercept or

react. Thus the game appears to lack what is regarded as the essence of modern combat, and the values of reserves appears to be understated. It is simply not possible to simulate real life tactics. For example, it is not open to the Warsaw Pact player to attack NATO, succeed, and then exploit that success, for directly after the Pact combat, NATO gets to move.

Despite that criticism, which is a subjective one, the game does handle the topic in quite an ingenious manner. Each unit is given an 'A' strength, and a 'B' strength. Ground units are back printed with one side representing movement, and the other side signifying combat.

By reference to a game chart, and the type of combat occurring, the particular value to be used in each combat is determined. The three types of combat results tables are very similar, with ground and helicopter units suffering disruptions which can range from damage 1, to damage 4. Anything from D4 up means the big sleep. Units can recover from disruptions gradually. Air units can suffer their missions being aborted, or partial casualties which can halt a flight.

The battle manual, which includes the advanced game rules, also includes the scenarios. There are twelve of these, some of which can be played with the basic rules only. Avalon Hill also provide an excellent series of optional rules. It is suggested that most gamers who have an interest in the topic (and therefore realism) will want to use as many of the optional rules as possible, though this is likely to slow down play considerably because of the wealth of detail involved.

Without the optional rules the game plays very well indeed. Avalon Hill are to be commended in that **Tac-Air** is a playable way of looking at air-to-land combat. They have set out to deal with this whole new concept and provided a game that is playable, but still produces plenty of problems for the player to solve.

The game plays well, and is both exciting and challenging. When attacking the player has to mass his ground units to overwhelm the defender. He can use his very mobile helicopters to switch from one flank to the other, and his other air units to really force the issues. However, he must conserve his air defence resources

and place them thoughtfully, to avoid leaving his troops open to airborne enemy attack. Throwing in artillery, supply, and headquarters units increases the responsibilities and options. For the realism freaks, the game does have certain rough edges. For example, if an air defence unit fires at two air units which are stacked, then it is less likely to be effective. Therefore, the most common tactic is for air units to be stacked together. I'm not sure if this is supposed to represent local suppression of air defence capabilities. Whatever, it seems a little strange. Also a bit weird are the disruption effects: at disruption level 1, a unit may not attack yet still retains its zone of control. This

produces the rather unrealistic tactic of moving a D1 unit up to the opponent and forcing the opponent to attack because adjacent zones of control force combat to occur.

While the rules are comprehensive, they could have been organised more efficiently. If ever there were a game suited to programmed instruction (i.e. learn a few rules, play a scenario, learn a few more rules, etc.) then Tac-Air is it.

None of this should detract from the enormous amount of information that is available in this package. The publishers have made it clear that they have tried to cram in as many counters

as possible and that, for the larger scenarios, additional markers may need to be made. Though if any of you get as far as the larger scenarios, then the effort of making more counters will be nothing. The physical quality of the components is excellent; the counters are liberally adorned with silhouettes, while the mapboard is extremely well presented.

Tac-Air may be something of a missed opportunity in the realism stakes, but it is a good game. With the information available, it would only take a minute's tinkering, at little cost to playability, to address some of the realism issues.

E.S.

PAPER ROUNDS

Ellis Simpson fires a few volleys in the general direction of magazine games, in the first of an occasional series.

Pacific Rim Publishing Company was set up by Jeffery Tibberts to purchase *Strategy & Tactics* from TSR. When that idea failed, having already assembled the staff, resources, and financial backing, he decided to launch *Counterattack* magazine. You guessed it a magazine with a game in it.

Drive On Frankfurt

The first issue has now been released and features a Jon Southard design: **Drive on Frankfurt**, a hypothetical attack on NATO by the Pact.

Counterattack is a very professional production, easily matching what I would describe as the 'old S&T', but in case anybody is unfamiliar with that treasured antique it might be as well to say that it is extremely well put together. It contains 68 A4 pages (excluding the covers) of clear text and ample illustrations. The articles have a heavy bias towards the game topic (WWIII), and include Bill Gibbs on modern combat doctrine, Major Henry Cord Meyer III (I kid you not) on the Bundeswehr, Owen Stanley writing about Soviet combat philosophy, and Michael Bennighof with the hitherto undiscussed topic of the potential for a NATO attack to unify Germany. Did I

say heavy bias? Make that total. Personally I feel this is the major defect in the project. In the accepted tradition of wargame journals there has always been something for (almost) everybody to read, but now that *Counterattack* and *S&T* are going in the opposite direction they must know something I don't.

And now onto the game. I have only meddled with it, but it looks about ten times better than 3W's standard bill of fare. This is a full size production with a McGowan Studios map, 200 counters of good, well die-cut quality, and a 20 page rule book bound into the centre of the mag.

The map is clear and acceptable: however not every hex has been numbered. For some unexplained reason there is numbering on certain alternate hex rows only, so setting up can be a bit fiddly. Unfortunately a game turn track is missing, and while it is not essential it would be nicer to have in than out.

The counters use standard Nato symbols and are back printed to show they have been activated. This is a battalion regimental game with the units of the same formation (brigade/division) marked out by coloured bands. Unit types include

helicopters, artillery, airmobile, headquarters and electronic warfare.

I recall playtesters of Southard's **Fire Team** reporting that he was upset by any suggestion that his game was **Squad leader** with chits. I wonder what derivative would upset him about **Drive on Frankfurt**?

The system reeks of an attempt to simplify the old SPI **Central Front** series; the two scales are the same (4K hexes and 12 hour game turns), he even admits to using a **Central Point** map to start his design off. However, what is important is to assess if he has succeeded. With twenty pages of rules you may find it difficult to believe but this game really is quiet playable. The size of the rules can, in the main, be explained by the clear desire to avoid cramming the text. Also there are four pages of self explanatory tables plus one page of design notes. Unlike many other designs I found that the rules were pretty clear from the first reading and encouraged me to sit down, cut out the counters, and get playing. For that alone he has to be commended.

The system itself uses the concept of formations activating; this can be muddled by electronic warfare (EW), but there is a great deal of flexibility in how you go about it. These impulses are

alternated between sides until both players pass, or a random die roll prevents further action.

The units have step reduction, with a twist in the optional rule that requires units in combat who have not suffered losses to take a strength marker. The strength markers are fronted 1, 2 or 3 steps. Hidden on the back are the actual combat values for the type of unit. This is a rebirth of Joe Balkoski's **Victory in the West** system for SPI and makes for much misfortune and entertainment. I am not certain if there are enough markers but this should allow me to remind myself that this is not a toe to toe slugfest. Nato starts with few troops on the board to cover a wide area. The Pact comes on in droves and can threaten, feint, and steamroller. The counter density makes for good replay value.

Soviet doctrine is catered for by simple differences in road movement and ZOC rules as well as the artillery; the latter is an advantage Nato must use to the full. Nato flexibility has to be tempered by the US forces' (in particular) vulnerability to EW and the need to plug so many holes in the dike with not enough fingers. On the whole the chrome of the conflict is well presented. The brief designer's comments throughout the rules are a commendable feature which should be mandatory if gamers are going to be treated as consumers rather than mugs.

A couple of quibbles: I think the chemical warfare attributes being 'factored in' is a bit of a cop out. I accept that on the one hand I am complimenting the game for being relatively straightforward, but on the other I would have preferred at least a token CW rule. As it stands it's difficult for a novice to know how important Southard thinks CW is likely to be. Further, there is only one scenario. Some variations on the theme would be welcome. The Victory Points per the rulebook differ from the map, an unfortunate mistake, but not too crucial, though a warning that 3W-style errors of this type will quickly disillusion potential purchasers. However, this is still the finest game in a mag debut, ever. If someone could assure me that Pacific Rim were here to stay I would sub tomorrow. Issue 2 is reported to have Markham/Seaman's **Lee Invades the North** which is right up my street and suggests that there will be a fair spread of topics catered for, although not all in the one issue. I

commend this to you all. I hope they go from strength to strength because a) they deserve to and, b) it will put more backbone into the Hobby.

Does anyone know the UK agent? Can I volunteer?

North German Plains

I would not like to be the UK agent for S&T. Keith Poulter is turning out to be King Midas in reverse: just look at the recent issues.

Let's start with issue 117, in particular the featured game. Is it a bird, is it a plane? No, it's the errata catching up with the last issue of S&T!

What we have here is the SPI **Central Front** series system 'updated' by Charles Kamps. Quite judiciously, for comparison purposes, the topic is identical to **Drive on Frankfurt** (modern combat on the operational scale) but the geographical location is different. In NGP the action takes place on (you guessed it) the North German Plains in the vicinity of Bremen and Hamburg. My hunch is the map (which is identical in style to the original series maps) has been in a drawer since Dunnigan and Simonsen departed. That's not a criticism, the map has clear features with excellent terrain identification. However, it does suggest that little work would be needed in updating the system and giving us old fogies another loving look at a great system.

The original game series used friction points. Essentially these allowed units to move/attack as often as required but at a cost they melted before your eyes. Kamps has rejected them. That's not modified, improved or amended; just plain rejected. Since these were, for me, the core of the game, this was a less than impressive discovery.

An honest gamer will tell you that when you have sufficient experience you do not need to play a game to be able to say what it's like; you may be able to assimilate much of the game by rereading the rulebook. Thus, my comments are not based upon play. I am, however, as near as certain as I can be, that if I had played the game, a) I would be of the same opinion, and b) I

would have wasted precious gaming time.

Let's live with the abolition of friction points. We get to replace them with a combat results table that is hit or miss, ie no step reduction. In an age of modern combat where most experts believe that troops and weapons will be expended as never before, this is still questionable. I cannot quite put my finger on it, but it still feels wrong.

Then there's facing. Facing? In a game turn of 6/12 hours? It brings back the days of the SPI tactical Ancients games, and has the feel of a rule for a rules sake.

Helicopters, disengagement, combat in general are okay. The electronic warfare rules are laughable; if ever there was part of the system needing an update, it was EW. The optional rules suggest using backprinted arrows to provide hidden units so you know not what is where; ludicrously, the printer has backprinted the counters in country colours, so you still have a good chance of locating the "hidden deployment" of US and UK forces.

Why can I not recommend you to buy this? Is it the yucky games system? Is it the care that allowed the legend "copyright 1983 West End Games" to appear on the Map sheet? (Apparently 3W used West End hex sheets and the printer forgot!) Is it the care that allowed the terrain chart to be inserted as an errata sheet? Is it the suspicion that any purchaser of this crap has been ambushed? I don't know. You tell me if I got it wrong.

As to the magazine itself, in between the adverts there are some feedback results which I just don't believe 84% played Kanev and rated it 7.92? This is a game where there's half page full of errata in the next issue. The piece on the Mozambique National Resistance went by unread, while the reviews of books and computers were at least entertaining.

The Tigers are Burning

Best of all was an article written by Ulrich Biennenmann and (his brother?) Dirk. This is an advance feature on the Ty Bomba game **The Tigers are Burning** to be featured in the

next issue, and quite frankly the only reason for buying the mag.

The Tigers are Burning (TAB) and issue 118 of *S&T* are both worth having. The game is ten monthly turns of campaigning in the Ukraine 1943-44 with 40 mile hexes, a smaller than usual map and 100 counters. It works.

Although TAB shows signs of having been crushed to fit into the 100 counter format, the edges are not too rough. The game system is movement and combat, Soviets first, but with some clever wrinkles.

Firstly there are no zones of control. Secondly the Soviet is tied to his five supply units which are ponderously slow. The further he dares to move from them the less effective (and more vulnerable) his combat units are, and the less they can move. Simple, and effective. Thirdly, during the movement phase mechanised units can 'mobile assault' (ie overrun) with only extra movement points to pay. Fourthly, the victory the Soviets are looking for is based on territorial conquests. This means that the Hitler idiocy factor is there because if, as most sensible commentators suggest, the German retreats to behind the Dnepr river he gives victory to his opponent. Therefore he has to stay and fight it out in some risky positions.

Also, because the Germans move second and can see each turn what victory point total is required, they can frequently snatch victory away from the Soviets particularly if the latter has outreached his supply.

The chrome includes strategic movement, weather, partisans, air support, artillery, invasions and paratroopers. It plays well, but takes time because so much has to be planned. It demands your attention without too many rules: the 16 page rulebook is not as well written as it could be with essential rules hidden in the text. (For example: see rules 5.40, or 13.8, or 17.19.) It is all there as far as I can tell, but it could be better presented. Graphically 3W's rules are a ducking disaster. The map colours are garish but more important is the fact that replacement steps are not on the map and to find the effects of combat you have to return to the rulebook, all of which means considerable tooting and froing. Really lining up the howitzer, now I find that the terrain

effects for combat are based on percentage reductions, but the rules do not state whether these should be applied to stacks or units. I decided it was by stack. The provisions of the terrain deductions are not clear but it is assumed that the percentages are rounded up as per rule 17.15. A ready reckoner chart could, and should, have been provided.

Continuing the gripes, there's no weather indicator, and a dead /withdrawn units indicator on the map would have been useful.

There is also no help for resolving the retreat of overstacked units, I assumed the extra unit(s) kept retreating. And finally there are two identical victory tracks where only one is necessary, as evidenced by the one marker provided.

On the whole though, this is a very acceptable game. Perhaps more time should have been spent on development and making the rules a little clearer. Maybe this is nit-picking because it's the first time in quite a while that I've enjoyed a *S&T*/3W game and I hope it's not the last. Ty Bomba, you have surprised me. The crud that was **Dynamo**, and **End of the Iron Dream**, cannot really be you, can it?

Back to the magazine itself, I must give mention to the lead article which is by Thomas Scheben on the Ukraine campaign of '43/44. I actually felt I learned something here, although a map would have saved a lot of time in trying to work out the "who was where and what was when" type questions that arose. The rest of the mag was unimpressive.

Once more I am suspicious of feedback results. I wonder how many responses were received to give the 7.2 score to the dreaded **North German Plain** game? Is Poulter not somewhat duplicitous when he concedes that "about half applauded the removal of friction points... the other half bewailed it" or is there something I am missing? A more intriguing prospect however, is Richard Berg's reworking of his **Terrible Swift Sword** system. Now that will be interesting.

The Wargamer

Shot & Shell, the 3W hybrid of the old Yacinto acquisition **Ironclads**, gets a

big plug in issue 4 of the 'new' *Wargamer*, even to the extent of adorning the cover. Something of a backhanded compliment though, for the artwork is the worst I've seen for some years, and the presentation throughout the mag is little better.

The content is pretty mixed with an article entitled "Pro-Nazi Bias" making its bid for the most obvious space filler of all time award. On the plus side there's a very informative review of **Pattons Best**, and an excellent article by Wayne Close on West End's game system for their American Civil War Series which West End themselves would do well to read, especially as their quadrant of Civil War games is due for release in a single package early next year.

Postscript

Further playings of **Drive On Frankfurt** suggest that, if anything, the fluidity and flexibility may have been understated. To be specific, the combination of insufficient units and too much ground to be defended gives the NATO player a tough task; he has to conduct a mobile defence, ready to snap back if the Pact come on too fast. The Pact, however, have to make haste. They can try to turn the NATO line by their aerial threat and by forcing the flanks or by punching a hole in the centre. Between these conflicting aims the game copes admirably without inducing boredom or hatred of an improperly developed system.

This further experience does bring two niggly points to bear. One of the attendees at a recent wargames convention suggested the terrain analysis around Frankfurt was a bit off, but nothing serious. Also, there are insufficient strength markers provided, so making your own in advance will save time later.

Despite these newly found qualms, my original opinion of the game remains basically unchanged.

WARGAME REVIEWS by Ellis Simpson, Mike Siggins and Brian Walker.

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

LIVING STEEL

DESIGNED BY
BARRY NAKAZONO

PUBLISHED BY
LEADING EDGE

PRICE £16.95

Rhand had been a pleasant world. The ruling 'Starcaste' used it as a retreat from the hectic life of their interstellar empire. A place where they could relax in beautiful surroundings tended by the lowly 'Landcaste' and 'Bondsmen'. A resort world. A safe haven. A warzone.

The attack by the alien 'Spectral' was a complete surprise. The little starfleet was destroyed before it could react; the planet laid bare. The quiet backwater of Rhand lost its major cities to bombardment, and 80% of the remaining population to chemically induced madness.

Then, without warning, the single Spectral warship that had wreaked the havoc exploded. None knew the cause and few cared. They managed a feeble cheer as they climbed back out of the rubble.

Two months later, a damaged ORCA satellite completed its self-repair programme. The ORCAs had formed relay stations for the transglobal teleport system. They were also used as bases for the planet's Alpha Teams; police, rescue, and medical personnel who remained in cryo-store until they could be teleported where they were most needed. The ORCA woke its Alpha Teams and also its Ringers. The Ringers were elite warriors, injured in

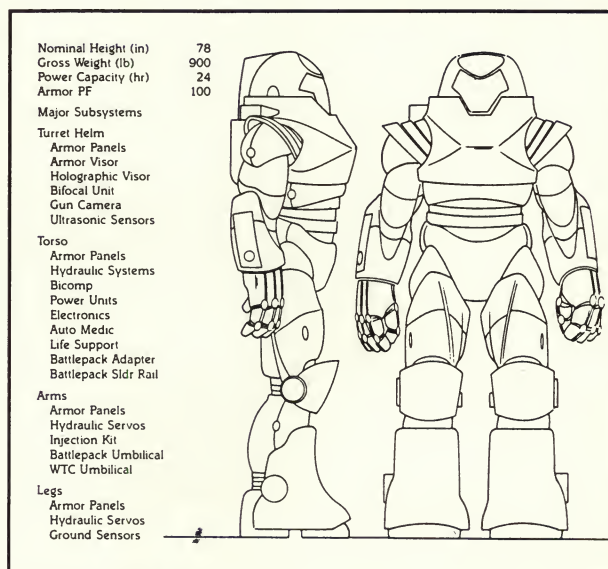
battle, who had been cryo-stored until their injuries could be healed. Now they were revived, 150 years after their freezing, and in the aftermath of the Spectral attack ordered 'to save the culture and soul of our people for a time when they might rise again.'

The players take the part of Ringers and/or Alpha Team members who have been revived after the attack to help civilisation back on its feet. This is rather like the setup in *Morrow Project* and plotlines from both games' scenarios should be interchangeable.

In *Living Steel*, character generation requires lots of dice rolls but is fairly straightforward. You roll 4D6 + 48 and 'buy' Primary Characteristics (strength, intelligence, will, health, agility). The Secondary Characteristics are rolled directly on 3D6. Once the basic framework has been determined, you can roll on the background tables to find the skill levels of the character. Each roll on these tables represents an appointment or action in which the player character was involved. There are no set number of rolls to be made so the experience of starting PCs can vary

quite a bit. If the GM wants to, there is enough background historical info presented to liven up this generation process considerably. Having completed the character's background, the character is issued standard equipment and some derived stats are calculated. One of my complaints about the system appears here: in order to generate the number of combat actions available per turn, you need to know the character's encumbrance. This is the weight of the equipment *being* carried, rather than how much *could* be carried. This means that every time the character picks up, drops, or throws something away, you may have to recalculate several values. As combats are rather complex anyway this is something you don't need. Lastly, some non-combat oriented skills are allotted. These are presented almost as an afterthought and are not catered for on the character sheets. In fact, the character sheets need some redesigning as they do not have spaces for all the info which should be on them.

Despite there being a large section on construction and repair, the hype for *Living Steel* is based on its combat. The



Seven Sword Power Armor

'unequalled realism' of this system apparently provides 'unparalleled excitement'. Well, I dunno about the excitement bit, but it's certainly realistic. Each two-second turn, a combatant allots their combat actions to movement and firing. As the actions have a fixed cost, it is obviously a big advantage to have lots of combat actions to spend. Movement is dealt with before firing as targets may appear or disappear during a turn, and the rules are set up so that, once committed, a character cannot 'change his mind' too much. Once you have the hang of it, the movement rules work very nicely. Actually blazing away at someone is easy to work out. Oddly enough, gun combat skill isn't actually used when calculating whether or not you've hit someone. Instead it is factored into

determining how many combat actions you have, and as accuracy increases with each action spent aiming it improves your 'to hit' chances that way: a nifty idea. This means that in game time you only have the following variables to consider: firer's stance, range, target's size, and motion. The tables for these are sensibly arranged and easy to use. If you do hit someone then you roll to find where, and cross reference this with the impact damage left from penetrating the armour of the target. This gives you the physical damage done which is then used to see if the target falls unconscious, is disabled, etc.

The background is well thought out, and well developed. The mechanics are (reasonably) comprehensive.

Everything is clearly explained. The only real problem is a slight confusion of purpose. A large portion of the goodies in the box are to do with combat. The Mission Suggestions state that 'Living Steel should not be a game of military conquest...' Hmm. Who's right? Well **Living Steel** provides the material for PCs to loot or rebuild; it's your choice.

All in all, **Living Steel** impressed me. Having seen the adverts and read the box, I was wondering what manner of rubbish I'd got. Ignore the hype; for once the reality is better.

J.T.

EN GARDE

DESIGNED BY
DARRYL HANNY &
FRANK CHADWICK

PUBLISHED BY
THE SMALL FURRY
CREATURES PRESS

PRICE £7.95

Role-playing games are normally difficult to review as they have such vast scope and depend on the person running them. *En Garde* is somewhat easier as it is more structured and less freewheeling than most of the genre.

It originated from just a set of duelling rules and grew from there. The original rules were copyrighted by Games Designer Workshop in 1975. At first, the more structured outline meant that face-to-face play didn't have the appeal or infinite scope of other role-playing games, but it quickly found a place in postal where it has flourished ever since.

This new edition of the rules is published by the London based Small Furry Creatures Press under licence from GDW.

There must be many of you out there who haven't heard of *En Garde*, so for your benefit I'll give you a quick run

down on what the game is all about: Each player assumes the role of a gentleman of Paris circa 1600. Through use of the *regle du jeu* you attempt to rise up the social table using such activities as:-Joining the best clubs/regiments, courting mistresses, gambling, and so on. All these actions can gain or lose what are referred to as 'status points'.

Each action normally takes a week, and each turn consists of 4 weeks. Your activities for the four weeks are planned in advance by way of a set of orders. These are then checked, and outcomes decided. To rise up the social table, an increasing number of status points must be obtained. Much of the game inevitably involves making friends and enemies, and it is here where most of the player interaction occurs. You will need to cultivate the friendship of influential characters to aid your rise while giving a wide berth to powerful characters who hold a grudge against you. This could be caused by courting the same mistress, or maybe they just simply don't like you.

Although death on the field of honour is rare, the battlefields are strewn with the excrement of society. Most characters have at some point to fight for their country, if only to gain loot to pay for living the life of Reilly in Paris.

One advantage of this type of game is that it does not matter when you join, or at what level. Even if your character gets killed off, you can start off again in a new body. Each character is 'rolled up' using the tables provided. Die rolls determine strength, constitution, duelling expertise, military ability, income, and

starting status level. Once all the attributes (or lack of) have been determined, you can name your character and start planning his life in gay Paris.

Like all role playing games, you get out of it just what you put in. Remember though, there are no winners and losers, just simply players. The options, though finite, are quite varied. You could try to be the best swordsman, lover, commander, politician, gambler, sneak, or even a downright cad sir! It's up to you.

Returning to this new edition, they have acknowledged that no changes have been made to the rules, only the layout which, I can say, is an improvement. The various charts and tables are now with the relevant sections, and thick glossy reference sheets are now provided separately so you don't have to thumb through the booklet when referring to them. There is also a whole new section on postal play which includes a very useful character record sheet and monthly turn order form which can be photocopied. It is good to see that this potential has been recognised by the publishers. The illustrations are excellent and help players to get a feel for the game.

To sum up, the game is already well established and works exceptionally well, especially postally. This new edition retains all the old rules with a superior presentation.

Have fun, and may your rapier never be bent!

R.A.

TROLL REALMS

DESIGNED BY
GREG STAFFORD &
SANDY PETERSON

PUBLISHED BY
AVALON HILL
(CHAOSIUM RUNEQUEST
SUPPLEMENT)

PRICE: £7.95

The way of trolls has long been mysterious to humankind. Yelmalion bards sing of trolls' cruel rapacity while neglecting their courage and love of boisterous jokes. Praxian nomads speak of feeding frenzies yet fail to understand the dignity of troll clan ceremonies. The ancient history of Uz, its great migrations and the heroic wars against chaos are rarely spoken of. The troll enigma will be explained in one of Chaosium's future releases, **TrollPak**, but for the moment **Troll Realms** will suffice as an appetiser. Here,

adventurers may walk freely among the stone-eaters, talking to, treating with and haggling against the descendants of Kyger Litor.

The 52 page booklet is produced to Avalon Hill's usual high standards with clear layout and simple, but effective, illustration. The interior can be divided into five sections: three scenarios, information on Trollball and Encounters. It pleased me to find that the latter wasn't the all too common "roll percentiles and refer to Tables 4b, Part IV..." rubbish; here we have a limited (but sufficient) information on a troll trade caravan, a set of moth-rider assassins from the Blue Moon Plateau and a disenfranchised trollkin horde. In fact, I'm happy to say that there isn't even a whiff of a random encounter table!

Two pages of prose and two of stats are dedicated to Trollball, that ancient and popular sport among the dark men. Any group that can't have fun with this really does take its gaming too seriously; participation is dangerous but even watching a game can be rib-ticklingly funny (and profitable!) for adventurers. It is disappointing though that **Troll**

Realms contains neither a field map nor even an illustration of one for the purchaser.

The three scenarios are the real delight of this booklet, and mere words cannot express exactly how impressive they are. Adjectives such as complete, rounded, entertaining, rewarding and sophisticated come to mind, but will not suffice. Flying trollkin is a compact and complete mini while Skyfell Lake and Grubfarm demand something special from your players. When was the last time your players were brave while knowing that they couldn't resort to force of arms?

Trolls Realms is, in truth, an exact uplift of Book 3: Into Uzdom from Chaosium's original **TrollPak** (minus the 22 pages on the Sezdorf Clan). If you already possess that boxed set then there's nothing here for you; if not, it's an essential buy. My experience in the hobby shows that the old **TrollPak** is in short supply with second hand copies selling at up to £30, so expect **Troll Realms** to sell exceptionally well.

P.M.

SNAKE PIPE HOLLOW

DESIGNED BY
GREG STAFFORD AND
RUDY KRAFT

PUBLISHED BY
AVALON HILL
(CHAOSIUM RUNEQUEST
SUPPLEMENT)

PRICE: £7.95

**

Snake Pie Hollow is an area of unclaimed land between the Lunar Empire's province of Torah and the Kingdom of SarLar, in northern Dragon Pass. A glance at the Hollow's inhabitants will explain why the area is

abandoned and its history details why terrible things accumulate here; beware this nest of chaos horror!

The attractively produced 60 page booklet is designed for repeated play, containing several region and local maps, almost 200 monster stats and over 25,000 words of prose. While written for RQIII Standard Rules, a Deluxe rules section is given and conversion back to the old RQII system would be as easy as downing a mug of Kvass for even a novice GM. Also included is a 12 page "Snake Pipe Hollow Digest" incorporating all the stats for the party's employers, wilderness encounters, a full map of the Hollow and a GM log.

The pack is something of a throwback to the late 70's, being a true dungeon hack-and-slay job, but that doesn't detract from its completeness, thought provoking problems and the sheer fun of it all. My only gripe would be regarding the spectrum of enemies within. First time adventurers could fight the Gorps, Rubble Runners and wimpy Veralzi, but even Rune Levels are going to have serious trouble with

the Mollie Temple, Big Club the Giant (31 points of armour on each leg!) and a ghost weaving a spirit severing sword. Only parties which invest considerable time and money into fully researching Snake Pipe Hollow at the local Lhankor Mhy Temple are going to be able to judge with any certainty when fleeing is the only sensible option. And believe me, the "Run away! RUN AWAY!!" tactic must be used on occasions; the alternative is death. Unfortunately, players who go in for hack-and-slay in a big way are the least likely to "fritter away hard-earned coin on old men with grey beards using big words"....

Finally a world of warning. This product is an exact uplift of the Snake Pipe Hollow published by Chaosium in 1981 - only the stats have been changed to protect the RQIII system. If you have already played or possess the old issue (like me) you'll find nothing new here (bar some pretty pictures).

P.M.

MEGATRAVELLER,

DESIGNED BY
MARC W. MILLER

PUBLISHED BY
GAME DESIGNERS'
WORKSHOP

PRICE: £16.95

THE KING IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE KING. OR IS THAT EMPEROR? (Being in the main a review of MegaTraveller).

A long time ago, in a land far across the sea, a Miller called Marc beheld the **D&D** that Gygax had created and saw that it was good. But he saw that it would be even better with starships in, so **Traveller** was born. A decade and a half later, **Traveller** continues to hold a significant share of the SFRPG market.

These days, **Traveller** has been split into two parts; **Traveller 2300** (a continuation of the **Twilight 2000** universe) and **MegaTraveller** (a continuation of the traditional **Traveller** universe). The confusion that this originally caused has since been eased somewhat by the dropping of the term 'Traveller' on the former game, leaving it simply as '**2300AD**'.

MegaTraveller inherits 15 years of development by GDW as well as articles in the hobby's fanzines and prozines throughout this time. This means that when it came time to produce a new standard version of **Traveller** (which **MegaTraveller** is) there wasn't any shortage of tried and tested mechanics for just about

everything. Consequently, the three basic books (£5.95 each or £16.95 the box – including a large colour map of the Spinward Marches) contain more background material and, more importantly, more ways of generating your own background detail, than any other non-merchandising SFRPG does in total. These three books are; the Player's Manual, the Referee's Manual, and the Imperial Encyclopaedia.

In the Player's Manual the basic rules required to play **Traveller** are explained; character generation (basic and advanced), combat, psionics, and tasks. Tasks are very important as they now form the backbone of all of the rules governing the PCs actions during gametime. Well then, what is a task? Basically it is anything that the character wants to do that is not automatically successful. If there is some doubt as to the outcome of an action, whether it be shooting at someone or repairing the coffee machine, the Referee defines a UTP (Universal Task Profile) which states the task's difficulty, which skills/characteristics help, how long it will take, and how risky it is. All the player then has to do is roll 2D6, modify it by the skills/characteristics mentioned in the UTP and compare the result with the task's difficulty. Simple really, but still not as simple as old **Traveller's** '8+ on 2D6 and you've done it'.

Back at the beginning; character generation is much as it always was. Changes have been made though, mostly to bring the number of skills a basic character gets into line with the advanced generation, and to include skills which were introduced after the original **Traveller Book 1** was written. Generation begins with six 2D6 rolls, one for each of the basic characteristics; Strength, Dexterity, Endurance, Intelligence, Education, Social Standing. Having done this, the player then either chooses, or randomly generates, the PC's Homeworld. The tables provided give a thumbnail sketch of the world and are weighted towards relatively pleasant places with large starports. Note that these tables are not the same as the ones in the Referee's Manual which provide a fuller range of possibilities. After this, the character is 18 years old and must (if they want any decent skills) enlist for a 4 year term in one of the eighteen available careers ranging from Barbarian to Bureaucrat, failing this, succumb to the Draft. Once

safely ensconced in a profession, the player rolls once each term for survival, position (equivalent to a commission in the military), promotion, and special duty. Failure to survive used to be fatal but in these enlightened times it is merely terminal careerwise. Achieving a position puts the character in the senior ranks and entitles them to roll for promotion up those ranks in later terms. Finally, receiving a special duty simply entitles the PC (in Basic generation) to an extra skill roll. Each term, position, promotion and special duty entitles the PC to one or more skill rolls. The player chooses one of the 3 or 4 tables available and rolls a D6. Some of the results of the tables are groups of skills rather than single ones, and if this is the case then the choice is the player's.

Having come through a whole term the character may try to re-enlist, succeeding puts them at the beginning of another 4 years, failure means that they have to muster out. A character is allowed rolls on the mustering out tables for time served and rank achieved, the benefits received from these tables may include more skills, increased characteristics, money, and equipment. After buying anything else they think will be needed the PC is ready to begin adventuring in earnest.

Advanced character generation is simply a more detailed version of the basic. Pre-enlistment options are open, such as College or Medical School. Each term is dealt with year by year rather than all in one lump. The procedure is similar to the basic with the addition of decorations, bonuses, and a breakdown of the types of special duty on offer (although the Merchant's table for this seems to be missing). Perhaps the most important addition in the advanced generation is Brownie Points. These are accrued for time in service, decorations, and special duties and are one-use modifiers to legally fiddle a dice roll which isn't what you want to start with. The effect of these is to give the player a degree of control over the development and ultimate fate of their character that they otherwise would not have. Unfortunately, only 5 of the 18 careers (Army, Marines, Navy, Scouts, Merchants) are given in advanced format; the ones which had already been detailed in Books 4 to 7. I think that GDW have been a bit lazy here in not adding any new advanced careers. All of the other 13 careers have the potential for development, and with the current political upheavals in the



game's background, GDW could really have capitalised on advanced generation for nobles. Whilst I'm complaining, another of the problems that I encountered was that advanced Army/Marine characters cannot get Combat Rifleman skill (which was originally invented specifically for their use back in Book 4) unless they have successfully been through Military Academy beforehand when they'll have a single level. Normal service will not train them 'in the use of modern combat rifles' – that's got to be wrong. Interestingly, basic generation does not have this restriction.

During the hectic game-lives of PCs there will eventually come a time when someone gets violent, and to deal with this a combat system is proffered. For old hands at **Traveller**, the **MegaTraveller** combat is like the **Striker/Traveller** interface (explained in **Striker**) with the addition of a Task system. For those that haven't a clue what I'm on about I'll try to explain how it works. The first stage in a potential conflict is to see if anyone has surprise. It is a task for the group making the first hostile move to achieve surprise, if any mishap occurs then their opponents have surprise and may decide to fade into the scenery instead of fight. If the side with surprise decide to fight, then they get to shoot-up the opposition with impunity until they raise the alarm. Surprise, once lost, cannot be regained. In normal combat one side will have the initiative entitling them to choose who goes first. Each side takes turns moving and firing one unit each, until none remain, and the turn ends. The action in a turn is assumed to happen in the order that it is resolved so that someone who is knocked out by the first unit to fire will not get to act later. To improve the 'realism' of this, there are rules for interrupting opposing unit's moves so that you can, for example, fire on someone as they dash across a clearing from cover to cover. Actually shooting or swiping at someone is (naturally) resolved by using the task system. That's what I like to see, a nice integrated set of mechanics. Rules covering damage are interesting mainly in that they have a shorthand form which tells you whether or not the character is well enough to fight on, as well as a more detailed form to describe the longer term effects. Unfortunately, there are no hit locations, damage is levied on a character as an amorphous whole.

Special rules cover fighting in high- or no-gravity conditions, communications during combat, movement in unusual terrain and onboard ship, explosive decompression, spotting and line-of-sight, burning things or blowing them up, chemical weapons, and my favourite; a UTP for starting any vehicle (moped to merchantman) which has been surprised, just imagine trying to jump-start your grav tank in the middle of a firefight. Refs should have a lots of fun with this one.

Finally, the Player's Manual deals with Psionics. In **MegaTraveller** a character will not know their psionic potential until they are examined by a Psionic Institute when they will roll 2D6 for it. One problem is that for every 4 years your psi potential remains untrained, after 18 years of age, it goes down by one. This means that characters who've had a long career will have feeble psi. A difficulty which is not addressed by the rules is that a character, at 18, before a career is chosen, has no money or equipment. Psionics Institutes charge highly for an examination (and extortionately for training) and characters wishing to start psi training at an early age will find it hard/impossible to pay.

Overall the Player's Manual contains the basic material that you will need to create and game with characters in **MegaTraveller**. There are several omissions, mainly in the tables, which are irritating but not too hard to overcome. They are, however, mistakes for which a large company like GDW has no real excuse. Being in the business to make money (reasonably enough) GDW have also made sure that the Player's Manual, by itself, is not really enough and I would not recommend purchasing it on its own. **MegaTraveller** improves with quantity; the more bits of it you have the better it is: read on.

Next up, the Referee's Manual. This contains all that you need to play God, or Grandfather (sorry, it's a **Traveller** joke). In addition it has rules and comments on various activities which may crop up in play, and some incidental background material.

Starting at the largest scale the Ref maps out the stars that appear within a Subsector. A Subsector is an area measuring eighty square parsecs, that's 850 square light years, that's BIG. Each Subsector averages about 35 stars but the exact number depends on where it is in the galaxy. It's all quite simple

really. Having worked out where the stars are, you can then proceed to defining their type, size, and any companions they may have. This data will lead into determining how many orbits exist around each member of the system, and what is in them (gas giants, planetoid belts, etc.) Finally, details of each individual world can be calculated. Of course, just because they give you all this material doesn't mean that it has to be used, the option is there though.

Once down on the planet's surface an intrepid (or otherwise) Traveller may meet up with some of indigenous lifeforms. To cope with this there are a set of mechanics which not only codify the beasties themselves, but also provide a mechanism for creating encounter tables. That's right, creating encounter tables. Amazing stuff eh, but wait. Our hero(ine)s are stranded without transport; enter a chapter on craft design. From Skodas to starships it's all here, 21 pages of charts and tables, and 6 more explaining how to use them. This is all followed by a further six pages to explain the finished product, whatever it may be.

The last section in the Referee's Manual covers starship combat. This is almost identical to normal combat (explained above) the only major differences being in the scales used and the weapons/defences involved. Once you understand one sort of combat you understand both.

The Referee's Manual is an impressive array of mechanisms for providing detail in a colossal background. The description of **MegaTraveller's** universe of a shattered Imperium is built up by a combination of the three books but the given information tends to be the stuff that the PCs would see on the news rather than participate in. The Referee's Manual gives the Ref the



ability to add considerable colour and interest to the PCs immediate surroundings. With a bit of work, the craft design rules should mean that even something as mundane as taking a taxi from the starport should be an interesting experience.

The last book of the basic trilogy contains the bulk of the prepared background material. The majority of the Imperial Encyclopaedia is made up of Library Data (miscellaneous bits of info any decent computer, and hence PCs, should know), and equipment/vehicle lists. The Library Data supplies a general overview of races, events, and institutions of both the modern day and historical Imperium. The players should be allowed access to this material but only the 'noddy' version. There is additional Ref only info on some of the entries as the bias of the (game world) compiler is prone to shine through. The difference between the two entries is sometimes highly amusing. Pity the players don't get to see.

The equipment listings are reasonably comprehensive for the type of game that

MegaTraveller is; highish SF rather than 'grubby'. The most obvious symptom of this is the fact that prices for food, rations, rooms, etc are not present. Instead of dirtying his hands with the daily mundanities of life, a PC simply forks out 250 credits times his Social Standing per month for his upkeep. Whether you like this or not is up to you, I would rather the prices were broken down. The vehicles and starships presented represent a basic selection of both civilian and military vessels from the Imperium and beyond. The 22 space- and starships given have complete stats for their use in combat, trading, etc. The big letdown is that none of the ships are provided with deckplans. As a sizeable portion of any **Traveller** PC's life is likely to be onboard one ship or another this is a large and annoying gap.

On top of the miscellany of entries in the Library Data section there are a couple of essays. The first is on nobles, their place within the Imperium, and what the different titles mean. Adjoining this is a complete list of the Emperors to date, not particularly practical but some of the biographical notes make

interesting reading nevertheless. The second essay is on the subject of travelling. Classic stuff with tasks for such things as discovering stowaways and skimming gas giants for fuel. Useful material on the cost of purchasing and running a starship, wages for the crew, and crucially, how much you can charge for passengers and cargo (the full trading rules are in the Referee's Manual). Lastly, two pages of starship operating procedures which show all of the tasks and times required to complete each portion of an interstellar journey. Most useful.

The contents of the **MegaTraveller** box as a whole are ambitious in their scope and (generally) helpful in their presentation. Although there are some typos and omissions, overall, **MegaTraveller** is a success. If you like your SF on a grand, starspanning scale, and don't want to play the game of the film, then **MegaTraveller** is the system for you.

J.T.

REBELLION SOURCEBOOK

DESIGNED BY
MARC W. MILLER

PUBLISHED BY
GAME DESIGNERS'
WORKSHOP

PRICE: £5.95

***¹/₂

WILL THE REAL EMPEROR PLEASE STAND UP?

The complacent Imperium of old **Traveller** has been shattered by the murder of emperor Strephon. As the news ripples out from Capital it touches every citizen. Who will you support? Who should sit on the Iridium Throne? The greatest empire in galactic history is being carved up, and everyone wants a piece of the pie.

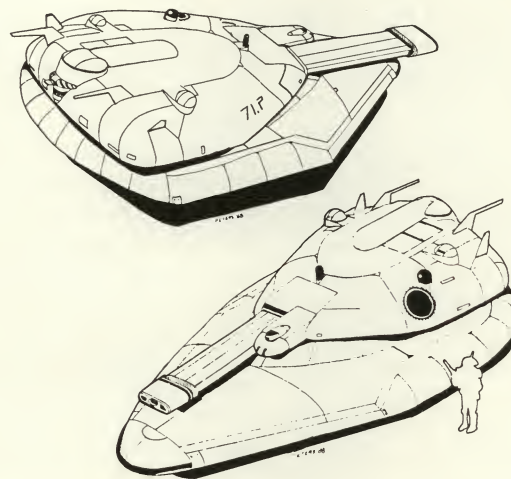
The assassin, Archduke of Ielish, claims the throne, so does the emperor's nephew, and his cousin. Huge tracts of territory have declared their autonomy from the Imperium. Aslan colonists and Vargr corsairs swarm across the borders. Emperor Strephon himself appears and declares the corpse to be his stand-in. Confusion is total.

This 100 page sourcebook aims at reducing that confusion, at least for **MegaTraveller** Referees. Inside its glossy cover will be found essays on

each of the major factions in and around the Imperium. Maps graphically demonstrate the areas each controls. Fleet dispositions and organisation are explained. Sixteen pages of equipment (still no bloody deck plans) are given. Everything (on top of the basic set) needed for months of gaming; potential scenarios abound.

There's not really much point in me continuing here; if you don't play **Traveller** then it's useless, if you intend to run a game it's essential. 'Nuff said.

J.T.



MEGATRAVELLER REFEREE'S COMPANION

DESIGNED BY
MARC W. MILLER

PUBLISHED BY
GAME DESIGNERS'
WORKSHOP

PRICE: £5.95

WOT NO DECKPLANS?

Companions to rulesets are a relatively recent event, at least under that title; they used to be called errata sheets. This one is no exception to the general rule that companions are a compilation of topics related only insofar as they purport to be for the same game. The **Referee's Companion** expands both the rules, and the background of **MegaTraveller**.

ALIENS & ROBOTS. Four races are dealt with; Aslan, Droyne, Vargr and Zhodani. Robots are treated as a fifth race. Background material for each race includes an overview of their history and significant dates. Cultural details expand on the institutions, traditions, and mysteries of each race. I found the most interesting part to be the notes on psychology. It is a pity that there are not rules for alien PCs, as trying to roleplay an Aslan, for example, would be quite a challenge. To add colour to the alien NPCs, worlds, etc, a handful of words in each language are given as well as tables for randomly generating more of your own. Robots don't have their own language.

RESEARCH, TECHNOLOGY, & MEGACORPORATIONS. The **Referee's Companion** introduces a set of rules to govern original research, a step which makes "scientist" almost a worthwhile profession. Starting with a hypothesis, the researcher must use his skill (and dice) to test and re-test until, by careful analysis of the results, he comes up with the correct answer. He thinks. Meanwhile, away from the Professor Brainstorms in the back room, mainstream science plods ever onward. Exactly what exists at each tech level (from 0 to 21), in eleven different

categories, is tabulated for easy reference and explained over 7 pages of text. A Ref will never have any more problems with questions like "90% hydrographics and tech 3; what are their boats like?" Lording it over all these wonderful, and not so wonderful, gizmos are the megacorporations. These 13 empire spanning companies are briefly mentioned, the primary interest being to add colour, or for use as potential employers for the players.

LARGE SCALE COMBAT, CAMPAIGNS & MAPPING. Large scale combat is very nearly identical to normal combat, scale is the only real difference. Notes and advice on how to graduate from the small time to running large campaigns are a heady mixture of useful ideas and the blindingly obvious. I would imagine that many experienced Referees will find most of the comment fairly self evident. If you intend to conduct adventures on a grand scale then you will need maps of the areas of interest. Those helpful bods at GDW have kindly provided six pages of hexmap blanks from local to Sector in scale.

Very little of this supplement has not been dealt with before in one or other old **Traveller** related products. If you are upgrading from **Traveller** to **MegaTraveller** then look carefully at the old supplements, copies of the *Journal of the Travellers Aid Society*, etc that you have before you buy. If you can only afford one supplement to your game then buy the **Rebellion Sourcebook** instead.

J.T.

TOP TWENTY ROLE PLAYING GAMES

- 1) **Tatooine Manhunt** (West End)
- 2) **Minas Tirith** (I.C.E.)
- 3) **Kafer Sourcebook** (GDW)
- 4) **Star Wars Campaign** (West End)
- 5) **Guide to Cthulu** (Chaosium)
- 6) **Star Wars RPG** (West End)
- 7) **Star Wars Sourcebook** (West End)
- 8) **Rebellion Sourcebook** (GDW)
- 9) **Warhammer RPG.** (Games Workshop)
- 10) **Merp (Boxed)** (ICE)
- 11) **Basic D&D** (TSR)
- 12) **Mutans Down Under** (Palladium)
- 13) **Dreamlands** (Chaosium)
- 14) **Forgotten Realms** (TSR)
- 15) **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles RPG** (Palladium)
- 16) **Forgotten Realms 4** (TSR)
- 17) **Warhammer 40K** (Games Workshop)
- 18) **Rolemaster** (ICE)
- 19) **Rolemaster Companion 2** (ICE)
- 20) **Dungeon Master's Guide** (TSR)

Chart supplied courtesy of
Virgin Games

THE YEAR SO FAR

MINAS TIRITH (ICE)

Most impressive Middle-earth package yet: city details and scenarios for **MERP**, equally useful for any other fantasy rolegame.

STAR WARS (West End)

Better late than never, the classic space opera finally translated

lovingly into rolegame format. Excellent production.

GURPS SPACE (Steve Jackson)

At last **GURPS** (the Generic Universal Role-playing System) starts to go somewhere: in this case the vast emptiness of space. The comprehensive guide to designing a science fiction rolegame setting.

MAGIC MATTERS

An alternative to replacing spell lists is to hide them. **Jorune**, designed by Andrew Leker and Mark Wallace, published by Skyrealms, is an example of this. **Jorune** does this by integrating the magic system into the background. The first point to make about **Jorune** is that magic isn't called magic and spells aren't called spells. Isho is the term for magical energy, the 'constructive forms of Isho' (read spells) are called dyshas. This may be little more than jargon, but at least it is an attempt to create atmosphere. Moreover, the differences between **Jorune** and the more traditional systems do not stop here. Whereas in most fantasy rolegames magic in some form is available to the majority of races which can be used by players, in **Jorune** use of Isho is effectively restricted to just one player race. Of the three major races, humans, boccord and muadra, only the last can actually harness Isho. In fact use of Isho by muadra is obligatory. Their bodies act as capacitors attracting Isho to such a degree that controlled discharge of this energy is essential. This process is called kerning and in cities the casting of dyshas are only permitted in 'kerning bays'.

Dyshas are grouped into seven different Forms. Each Form has its own colour and set of characteristics. When a dysha is unleashed it takes on one of three physical forms, either as an orb, meter long bolts or as energy which trickles over the users body. A muadra in action must be very pretty to watch. Not only does a dysha have a physical form, it also travels in a straight line. Accordingly dyshas can be dodged. Both humans and Boccord can also 'interfere' with dyshas if trained to do so. This is a process of matching internal energy patterns with those of an incoming dysha, which if successful, disrupts the dysha and renders it harmless. The process can be learned at kerning bays.

Now this is all very well as far as it goes. But the concentration on atmospheric detail cannot disguise the fact that **Jorune** fails to go beyond the spell list approach. In reality **Jorune** is a game with just 46 spells, and many of these are little more than variants on a theme. Consequently using a dysha becomes a mundane and repetitive act, like tying your shoelaces or doing the washing up. There is nothing either mysterious or magical about it. The magic system in **Jorune** would be infinitely more interesting if it incorporated a different magical concept for each Form rather than just a spell list. As it stands **Jorune** is rather like an easter egg without the sweets: glitzy packaging on the outside, but empty and hollow on the inside.

So where does this leave us? Wholesale abandonment of the spell list concept simply kills most rolegames stone dead, while developing the background alone offers no escape from the sterility of the spell list. Well, if you can't beat the system, you subvert it. Ready comrades? We'll start with:

COSMETICS

I've just given you a good example of the use of cosmetics:

Jorune. Essentially a cosmetic can be defined as something which enhances the atmosphere of the game, but has no practical effect on the system. For example, the fact that a dysha takes the form of an Orb is a cosmetic, it could be a cube or banana shaped for all the difference it would make to how magic works. But it does make a difference to how magic is perceived by the players. Think carefully about the words you

use, think about the atmosphere you want to create and be consist with it. Keep banana shaped magic for your version of the Discworld. A few more points:

- 1) Invent your own magic terminology. Magic is mysterious: when dealing with magic never call a spade a spade.
- 2) Make magic users appear to be different from the populace. Even if magic is commonplace and accessible to all you can still set the powerful magic users apart.
- 3) Get carried away. Magic can't be mysterious if the practitioners are bland nondescripts.
- 4) Be theatrical. Don't forget the senses – what does magic look, sound, smell, taste and feel like?

For a more detailed examination of cosmetics read Simon Nicholson's article **Vance's Evocation of Arcane Delight in White Dwarf**, No 93.

FORM and BOUNDARIES

By Form I mean the structure of your magic system. Back to **Jorune** again: giving dyshas the physical appearance of Orbs is cosmetic, deciding that an Orb is a missile which must strike the target to work is to define the form of magic. Imagine what this would do to magic users in **D&D**.

Connected to the idea of form is that of boundaries. Are there things which magic cannot achieve? In 'The Hobbit' Gandalf is trapped in a tree by wargs and is unable to fly away. It could be argued that he simply didn't have the right spell, alternatively it could be argued the spell doesn't and couldn't exist. To introduce limited boundaries is to treat magic like science. It implies that the boundaries can be pushed back. For example, in 'The Web of Wizardry' the chief baddie's rise to power is based on the fact that he could fly and nobody else could.

If you decide to use boundaries then make two lists, boundaries which are absolute and can never be broken by magic and boundaries which are limited, then deal with your magic system accordingly. Remove all the spells which are 'prohibited'. Realise that by creating limited boundaries you are also indicating areas for potential spell research. Remember that if you

are conducting a 'realistic' campaign the introduction and use of new magic powers could have devastating effects. Perhaps what is needed is a way of making magic more unpredictable? *Quirks* and *randomisers* do just that.

QUIRKS AND RANDOMISERS

A quirk is a condition which causes 'disturbances' to your magic system. To introduce a quirk, think of a condition and decide on its effect. For example: alcohol and magic don't mix. Don't imbibe and incant, it will effect your performance. Perhaps drunks are magic resistant. Perhaps if you drink, your dweomer will affect yourself as well as the target. Notice how many assumptions I'm making. Alternatives at every turn.

Randomisers are similar to quirks. I define a quirk as something which can be discovered and chronicled, the kind of thing a wizard might warn an apprentice about. A randomiser is undetectable and unpredictable. To create a randomiser you need to know both what will cause it to occur and what 'it' is when it does. There are two methods of determining when a randomiser occurs. Within the game world itself you can simply assign a percentage chance to a particular type of event. The event can be as frequent or a bizarre as you like. For example, 1% per spell cast, 5% every time a chicken dies violently, 100% every time a magician walks through an open door. Please let me note, before someone questions these probabilities, that these are only examples and that I am only dealing with immediate events involving the player characters. Note also that unless you introduce a method for changing your events magicians will have a chance of discovering that they exist (ie your randomisers will become quirks).

The alternative method is to draw up a list of events outside the game world. For example, you could say that every time Player X rolls a D20 the next spell cast will be randomised. Or you could say every time Player X rolls a red die this will happen, or it will only happen if Player X doesn't roll that 'favourite' die, the one with the lead weight. OK, I realise it's wrong to pick on players. What about a particular seat (the one nearest the fire), or an item of clothing,

or a colour, or the first one to get the drinks in. The list is endless and as long as you've got a list you'll be all right – without one you'll be relying on GM whim, and is that really a magic system?

Once you've decided on the probability of the randomiser occurring you must decide the effect, the trigger and the target. Make up a list of results, eg spell fails, swords become magnetised, spell lasts double duration, belts snap, spell misses target, uncontrollable laughter, weather changes, eyeballs putrefy. You could create a new list before each gaming session and work your way down it as each randomiser occurs. Next determine the trigger. Just because conditions are fulfilled it doesn't mean that a randomizer is activated immediately. For example a magician encounters an open door. You check your effects list – next out is 'eyes putrefy' But what's the trigger? You could draw up a list of triggers. The reason for having a trigger is that by having two random sequences it becomes impossible to determine what causes the effect, ie it keeps it unpredictable. Let's say the trigger is the next magic spell cast. Next question, whose eyes? The magician who walks through the door? The caster of the spell? The target of the spell? Wait for it, you could decide randomly . . . Whoever it is, the effect is unpleasant. But then I suppose being caught in a fireball isn't much fun either.

MODERATORS, QUALIFIERS, PARAMETERS

Can you cast magic? I can't. A moderator is someone who can. Most games relate magic to the idea of intelligence. There are plenty of alternatives. What about defining moderators as a certain race, age, or sex? What about restricting magic to those with a certain eye colour, nose size, physical affliction etc? Jumbled lists which don't even scratch the surface. Perhaps to be able to cast magic you have to have committed a murder, saved a life, failed a suicide attempt, run a 4 minute mile, or had an article published in *White Dwarf*. These are all qualifiers, a specific action which gets you into the club. Make those actions secret and you've got your reasons for magic guilds, if you want them. Alternatively use the idea of parameters. A parameter is anything

which is a variable condition. For example, hair length, weight, number of children, wealth. With little imagination you can produce very interesting results. For example, suppose the ability to have magic was dependent on having exactly 12 children. This would make a magician very vulnerable. If one of those children died the magician would lose all power. Think of the plot possibilities. The magician keeps the children at home under lock and key but they want to live lives of their own.

Once you start thinking in this way it's like entering another world. So far I've made sweeping statements. You could be more specific. For example link particular magical abilities to the ideas above. Samson had superhuman strength as long as he left his hair to grow. The theme of blindness bringing the power of future-sight is fairly common. Take common ideas and twist them. So, let's say that blindness gives the power to invoke terrible curses, but only at the moment that sight is initially lost. This leads into the last question.

PRICE

In many films and books magic costs. The cost could be anything, but usually it's something valuable to the magician. In the film *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*, Tom Baker's evil magician ages as he casts magic. The more powerful the spell the older, he gets. The idea of price is usually reserved for 'black magic'. The soul is exchanged for magical powers. Several points arise here. You could decide that all magic has a price. You could decide that all magic is 'evil'. Whatever decision you make it must be effective. If magic is 'evil' make it 'evil'; make pain, suffering and death essential to make the magic work. For example: all powerful spells require the death of a friend. In other words make magic real to the players. The idea of losing a soul is all very well, if a bit hackneyed, but it means little to the players, after all a character that is dead is dead. From a game point of view the more immediate the price the better. I would term an immediate price as anything which affects the player's control over the character. Examples could include, bouts of madness, amnesia, sleep (until the magician never wakes), craving (drink, climbing a tree, insulting the king etc). A price could be temporary in nature (eg after casting a spell a magician is immobile for 5

minutes) or could be progressive, that is it builds up (eg an increasing chance of catching a disease), or truly immediate: death?

Again you don't have to think in global terms – different types of magic may have different prices. If you want to limit something give it a high price. The number of magic items in a campaign could effectively be controlled by this measure. Finally you can make a price conditional – if X happens then Y results. Let's say that all magic weapons are made for specific individuals and terrible consequences befall the individual whose magic weapon is lost.

Now the scene is set. The magician enters through the open door to face his ancient adversary. Too late, the lifeblood of the 12th child flows to the floor. The adversary grins, bloody dagger in hand. The magician invokes a spell, but the power that was once his has drained away. In a rage the magician charges at his tormentor. With a wave of the adversary's hand the magician crashes immobile to the floor. The adversary stands tall, dagger raised high, but even as the blade descends the magician's eyes explode. Too late, the blade claims its victim. The magician's curse springs into life. The dagger of harsh anger is broken and now the adversary must pay the price. I always did like melodrama.

Before I wind up two closing points. Lest I be accused of being unfair to magicians, remember these are only suggestions. It's your world and your magic systems. I've tried to demonstrate ways of making magic 'unsafe' ie more mysterious, unusual, ie more magical. Some of my examples taken to extreme would make magic a very hazardous profession. You could just introduce limited change, or you could introduce counterweights, give magicians an innate ability to detect quirks and randomisers, ways of avoiding or reducing the price etc. And finally, always, always think style. My examples have been chaotic, subvert your magic system with care. If you want humour choose humorous, light-hearted effects, if you want horror, think nasty. If you want drama, have limited but powerful changes. Make it unique and not just another spell system, and since this is where I came in, it's time to bow out.

Chris Hunt

P.B.M.

Play by Mail Games

*SOMEONE, SOMEWHERE, IS
AWAITING AN ORDER
FROM YOU.*

Linda Little investigates the growing field of Play-by-Mail Games.

In recent years role-playing has become an increasingly popular pastime among all sections of society, and to a large extent this is due to the arrival of Play-By-Mail (PBM) games. Prior to this, rolegames were limited to those who were willing and able to get together on a regular basis in pursuit of their hobby, but once these games became available by post, a great number of people previously unconnected with the hobby began to discover the joys of role-playing.

The first PBMs were modelled largely on the existing rolegames, so naturally there were many variations on **Dungeons and Dragons**, while others echoed the fantasy worlds made so popular by authors like Tolkien, Donaldson, and Moorcock. However, as demand grew, the PBM companies began to experiment in an effort to produce unusual games that would capture the attention of role-players.

Numerous games began to flourish, each with their own group of enthusiastic players, and yet, despite individual differences, most of them seemed to fall into specific categories.

The games with the longest lineage were the Military PBMs: **Ancient Empires** and **Muskets and Mules**, for example. Based on military campaigns and strategy of yore, these games were set in an historically accurate background, and were amongst the most intricate and complex on the market.

A more recent, but similar, style of game can be seen in what could loosely be described as the 'Territorial Dominance' genre, as exemplified by games like **Earthwood**, and **Crisis**. Here, each player becomes the ruler of

a city-state, or country, planning its commercial and foreign policies, and attempting to ensure its continued survival as an independent and (with any luck) thriving territory.

Some players like to work out their competitiveness in rather less aggressive ways, and for them the Sports PBMs are an ideal way to do this. In games like **Soccer Supremos**, **Gameplan** (see ad below), and **Slamdunk**, the player takes on the role of manager of a sports team. The aim is to make your own team the overall winners by any means available within the rules of the game.

Next we come to the Fantasy PBMs such as **Saturnalia**, **Raiders of Gwaras**, **Alkimora**, **Lands of the Crimson Sun**. The origins of these lie in table-top role-playing games, in which the norm is to play a single adventurer trying to make his or her way in a pretty harsh world. The worlds in question tended to be low-tech with mythical beasts and various sentient races.

A sub-genre of the Fantasy games are, strangely enough, Gangster games, such as **The St. Valentine's Day Massacre**, **Family Wars**, and **It's A Crime**. These games are either set in the early part of this century, or in the future. The common denominator is the criminal aspect.

For those whose tastes run to something a little more modern, then say hello to the high-tech Science Fiction games like **Starglobe**, **Star Empires**, and **Green Sun**, where magic is replaced by warp drives and laser cannons.

While most PBM games are

single character in style, there are a number of games where you can control a group and role-play the leader, as in **Infinite Adventures**, **Orion's Finger**, and **Dark Blades**.

The many different types of games obviously require different playing styles. However, the most notable difference in the games concerns the type of moderation involved. With the advent of new technology, the PBM companies soon found that games that could be entirely moderated by computer were far more financially viable than manually moderated games, as turns could be processed that much quicker. The limitations were in the sort of response that could be generated via computer and the sort of turns that were acceptable to it. Players had to be re-educated to fill in their turn sheets with a select number of variable responses, rather than in written prose. The computer, for its part, had to be programmed in such a way that its own response to the players was not merely a series of figures, but at least had some of the characteristics of a dialogue between player and GM.

Manually moderated games have certain inherent advantages: the first being that both player and GM are human (!), and therefore have little difficulty in correcting mistakes if the other's response is not clearly stated. The player can write a statement like 'I take all available precautions' (*Is this the Game of Safe Sex - Ed*) secure in the knowledge that the GM will know what is meant by that remark.

Not surprisingly, the human responses are more acceptable to the players than the automated ones, though with the increasing sophistication of computers, coupled with the rising level of skill in the programmers, this might not be the case for much longer.

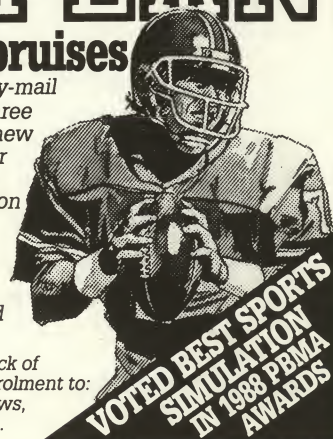
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GAMES CLUBS

Sigma Games Club meets every 2nd, 4th, and 5th (if applicable) Sunday of the month at the Intervarsity Club, Bedford Chambers, King St. Covent Garden, London. 3pm-10-30pm. Games played include **Empire Builder**, **Talisman**, **Titan**, **1830**, and many more.

Games meeting every Tuesday at the Bun Shop Pub, Berrylands Rd. Surbiton. 7pm till closing time. Wide variety of board games and role-playing games.

The GLC (R.I.P.) Wargames Club meets alternate Wednesdays and Thursdays in room 88, County Hall, on the South Bank, SE1 (nearest tubes Embankment and Waterloo). 6-30 till 10-00pm. Minatures, two player board wargames, **Warhammer 40k**, **Pax Britannica**, **1830**, etc.

The Nottingham and Derby Games Club meets every Thursday at the Queens Walk Community Centre, The Meadows, Nottingham. 7pm-10-30. Contact: Mick Haytack (0332) 511898.

GERMANY

Spielratzn at the Gross Wirt pub every other Friday. Winthstr. Munich 19, Germany. For further details contact: Bernd Brunnhofer 089 264150.

Fantasy World Role Playing Club in Munich. For more info contact: Detlov Motz, Vorholzerstr. 4, 8000 Munich 71. Tel. (089) - 795244.

USA

The North Shore Games Club meets approximately once a month somewhere in Massachusetts. Tournaments, food, and even a newsletter. For more details of this, and other East Coast games clubs, contact Alan Moon, 11 Broadway, Apt.1, Beverly, MA. 01918. Tel. (508) 922-7488.

East Valley Advanced Squad Leader Club. Contact: Pierce Ostrander, 5046 E. Decatur St. Mesa, AZ. 85205. Tel. (602) 985- 4505.

Windy City Wargamers meet twice a month. Minatures and board wargames, plus newsletter. Louie Tokarz, 5724 W. 106th St., Chicago Ridge, IL. 60415. Tel.(312) 857-7060.

New Orleans Games Club seeks players for all kinds of games. Contact: Greg Schloesser, 3800 Briant Drive, Marrero, LA70072. Tel. (504) 347-7145.

Hexagon Society meets every first and third Saturday From 10am to 6pm. Contact: James McCormack, 1450 Harmon Ave. 224c Las Vegas, NV 89119. Tel. (702) 794-3523 (evenings)

Penn-Jersey Gamers meet monthly and play most games, but no role playing. Newsletter, tournaments, raffles. Contact: Jim Vroom, 2290 Galloway Rd., A-23, Bensalem, PA 19020.

Schenectady Wargamers Association have regular meetings and hold weekend conventions featuring tournaments based on **Axis & Allies**, **Empire Builder**, and **Machiavelli**. Role playing too.

Contact: Eric Paperman, 418 Vliet Blvd. Cohoes, NY 12047. Tel. (581) 237-5874.

Santa Fe Springs Gamers Assoc. looking for new members to play boardgames and Role-Playing games.

Tues/Thurs 5-9pm. Saturdays 9am-5pm. at the Town Centre Hall, 11740 E.Telegraph Rd. Santa Fe Springs, CA. Tel. (213) 863-4896 (club hours only).

Washington Gamers Assoc. meets monthly, and publishes a bimonthly newsletter (\$5 for six issues). Contact: Dennis Wang, 2200 Huntington Ave. Alexandria, VA.22303. Tel. (703) 960-1259

Miami Gaming Club seeks new members. All types of games played. Meetings are once a week from 7pm to 11pm. Thurs. or Fri. at 7200 S.W. 7th St. Miami. Contact: Rex on 264-9752, or Steve on 271- 5418.

CONVENTION DIARY UK

MIDCON, 28th-30 October, Royal Angus Hotel, Birmingham. Featuring The British National Diplomacy Championships and and many other general Board Games. Contact: Brian Williams, 30 Ryding Lane, Millfields Estate, West Bromwich.

TORC '88. 29th October at the Ladywood Community Centre, Birmingham. Role playing convention featuring a dungeon competition, figure painting, and fantasy wargames.

EUROPE

ESSEN GAMES FAIR, 27th-30th October, Grugahalle, Essen (nearest airport: Dusseldorf). Highly Recommended, last year's attendance 65,000. For an information pack (in German) write to: Friedhelm Merz Verlag, Alberichstr. 15-17, 5300 Bonn 2, Germany.

Osnabrucker Role playing Fair, 26/27 November. City Hall, Osnabrucker. For more info Tel. (0541/2 23 28).

NORTH AMERICA

RUDICON 4, 14th-16th October, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY. Features, roleplaying, wargaming and minatures. Send SSAE to 0Rudicon 4, c/o Student Directorate, One Lomb Memorial Drive, Rochester NY 14623.

CON*STELLATION VII, 21st-23rd October, Huntsville Hilton, Huntsville. Concentrating on Science Fiction and Fantasy Gaming, features a dealer's room, art show, SF & Fantasy film and video contest, and of course, games. Registration: \$20 (\$15 before September 6th). Write to: CON*STELLATION VII, c/o North Alabama Science Fiction Association, PO Box 4857, Huntsville AL 35815-4857.

OCTOBERFEST GAMING 1988, 21-23 October, Lighthouse Recreation Centre, Riverside Drive, Detroit, Mich. Includes AD&D, Traveller Tournaments (fees \$2-\$4), as well as seminars and roleplaying costume contest. Admission free. Write to Erick Wujcik, PO Box 1623, Detroit MI 48231.

AUSTRALIA

MACQUARIECON'88, 9th-11 December. Australia's biggest Role playing convention. Write for info: Macquariecon '88, c/o MURPS, Box 83, Student Council, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, 2109.

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